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THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN SOUTH WALES

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THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN SOUTH WALES

BY NESS EDWARDS

WITH A PREFACE BY A. J. COOK,
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE MINERS'
FEDERATION OF GREAT BRITAIN

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PREFACE

THE greatest need of the present age is knowledge. The problems of to-day are different from those of the past and more difficult to solve. We must know before we can act; therefore it is very necessary that the workers should know the history and development of the present system. I commend this work of my comrade to all members of the working class, as it will be the means of proving conclusively the existence of the great class struggle. May we never forget the early battles of the pioneers of the Labour Movement.

This little book, a forerunner, I hope, of many like it, will help us to value our trade unions at their real worth. It will help us to reorganise our movement in the light of the past struggles. May the experience of the past be a beacon for the future. May we never betray the rebels that are gone, but build upon the foundations laid by their sacrifice and suffering. May we carry the flag forward courageously.

A. J. COOK.

July 29th, 1924.

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SOUTH WALES PRIOR TO THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

"TAFFY was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief," though only a nursery rhyme, is probably a characterisation surviving from the days when the roving tribes of Wales raided the rich pasture lands which lay on their eastern borders. Unable to eke out an existence on his barren mountains, Taffy had to be a thief in order to exist.

At the time when the Normans conquered England these raids were very common, and the newcomers were compelled to safeguard their conquests by attacking the Welsh. At first the whole might of the Normans was concentrated against them, but later the task was left to a number of barons. Along the borders and the South coast these barons succeeded in subduing the Welsh, and established themselves as rulers of the various districts. The old Welsh tribes were now penned into the mountain fastnesses of Central Wales, and from these strongholds still raided the lands of the barons.

Edward I. completed the conquest of Wales, and in order to consolidate his victory, he divided Wales into two portions, Shire ground and the Marches. The Shires, mostly situated in North and West Wales, were administered by sheriffs, appointed directly by the King. Through the sheriffs, the King's law was administered, order kept, and taxes gathered.

The Marches (now the counties of Monmouth, Brecon,

Radnor, Montgomery and Denbigh) were the stronghold of the descendants of the barons, who, because of their strength, were allowed to remain in absolute possession of their domains. They paid dues to the King and swore allegiance to him; but inside their domains each lord had absolute control. He had his own court, seal, and chancery, and also the right to maintain a retinue of soldiers. He made laws for his own domain, arranged and collected taxes, and had, within his own area, practically all the power of a king. Each domain had different laws and customs, and no one could be apprehended for a crime except in the domain where the crime had been committed. This form of administration was a perfect breeding ground for criminals and brigands, because it was an easy matter to slip across one border and into another domain. Besides, the stronger lords were fond of plundering their weaker neighbours, and often hired roving criminals and brigands for that purpose. Generally, the retinue of a lord consisted of a gang of these hired ruffians. And when not employed in the private feuds of their lords, these brigands carried out raiding expeditions of their own, plundering the homes and stocks of the small peasant farmers. In fact, it was the peasant farmer, the old free tribesman, who suffered most during this period, and to safeguard his life and homestead he had to wear the badge of some lord. Also, in addition to paying now for this doubtful security, he had to fight when called upon by his lord.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Marches were the most lawless and unsettled part of the country at that time, and during the period 1442–1461 a number of petitions were sent to Parliament for the suppression of robbers and brigands. Arising out of these petitions the "Council of Wales and the Marches" was established in 1478, and this acted as a sort of committee for public safety. It suppressed much of the brigandage and dealt with criminals in a most savage manner. But it checked the lords in their land stealing and prevented private feuds.

The position of the poor peasant, however, was little altered, as the cost of appealing to this council was high.

And even if he succeeded in making his complaint to the council, it would have been dangerous to have afterwards lived near the lord against whom the complaint had been directed. The lords enforced taxes from the peasants and serfs under an old custom called Cymmorthua. This forced exaction became very heavy, and, in all probability, caused many peasant uprisings, for the Cymmorthua was abolished by the council about 1534.

In 1535, by the Act of Union, Wales was joined to England and was, henceforth, subject to the same laws. The main purpose of the Act was to suppress the lawlessness that had its centre in the Marches. Under it, the Marches were transformed into Shires, each Shire being administered by a sheriff. The lords' law being abolished, the King's law became universal. The area of the Marches was now brought into line with all the Shires, forming an integral part of the national administration.

But the most important change introduced by this Act was the abolition of the old Welsh law of Gavel-kind. The old law of Gavel-kind compelled the male heirs of a deceased person to share equally their inheritance. Under the English law the eldest son was the sole heir to the father's property, and its application in Wales did much to destroy the old communal spirit of collective property. The stamp of individual private property was placed, beyond all doubt, upon all property.

This Act also decreed that the land had to be the property of some one. The stamp of private property was given to the land, legally destroying the old tribal and communal ownership of land.

During the reign of Henry VIII. (1509–1547) the power of the landlords was enormously increased by the dissolution of the monasteries. The Nationalist anti-English feelings of the lords were removed by grants of monastery lands, and their friendship with the English court was cemented with gold, silver, and lead from these monasteries. The Welsh landlords, with the aid of the English law, consolidated themselves as a class. The Herberts, Morgans, Lewises, Butes, Windsors, Dynevors, Beauforts, Nevelles, Talbots, etc., now dominated South Wales and

helped to suppress those whom their forefathers had led against the English. From being the leaders of the Welsh people, they now became their oppressors, and administered the law for the English Parliament. Their common interest with the English landlord class was expressed through their representatives, whom they now sent to Parliament.

The Act of Union also made another great change by abolishing serfdom and Feudal bonds. The serfs became copy-holders and tenants-at-will, whilst those who maintained their freedom were recognised as the owners of the land they tilled, on condition they paid a quit rent to the Crown. This rent, generally, had to be paid in money, whilst in the main, the rents of the tenants-at-will and the copy-holders were paid in kind. The law of primogeniture increased the number of copy-holders, because the majority of sons now had to take land as copy-holders or seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Now let us turn more particularly to the mode of production which prevailed at this time.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century practically all the old feuds and revolts had ceased. The stabilising of the administration and the small population allowed agriculture to develop until it became the occupation of the majority. However, owing to the hilly conformation of the land agriculture was confined generally to small scale peasant holdings. On the hillsides, around which the bitter winds howl, and against which the south-westerly rain clouds break, the land is none too fertile, and, for the most part, only suitable for cattle and sheep grazing. At the period of which we are speaking, goats, sheep, and mountain ponies were reared on these hills, and in addition to the cultivation of small plots of land formed the occupation of the peasants. Generally, the peasant and his family were able to manage this type of holding, although occasionally an additional man would be employed and treated as one of the family.

In the main, it would be true to say that these peasant holdings formed the unit of production and the family the productive group.

Down at the lower ends of the valleys on that stretch of steadily undulating land which runs around the outer edge of the South Wales coal-field, agriculture on a large scale was possible. The agricultural practice of the abbeys and church houses at Tintern, Neath, Llanthony, Margam and Ewenny was a valuable example to the peasant farmers and the lords. The Church, in fact, during the Dark Ages performed a very useful function in so far as it preserved, improved and diffused a relatively high technique of production. The abbey lands of this period presented the most well-cultivated appearance, and were easily the best managed. Benefiting from this model cultivation the farmers on this area made great progress. As agriculture extended, hired labour became more necessary. Most of the lords, descendants of the conquering Norman barons, still worked a portion of their lands through bailiffs. These bailiffs, to the extent that rents and rents-in-kind had been commuted for money rents, were compelled to hire the necessary labour for the ever-increasing and more intensive agriculture. Many of the brigands, plunderers and robbers who had infested the districts, no longer able to carry on their old trade, were compelled to hire themselves out. The retainers who had followed the various lords also were forced to follow a new calling, as their existence as retainers was no longer necessary. Practically, from these two sources alone there gradually developed a class of wage earners in agriculture. At first this class consisted mainly of day labourers, but as agriculture developed the hired ploughman, hedger and ditcher, shepherd, cowman, and so on, became more common. The extension of agriculture was followed by a division of labour in agriculture.

Now, to the extent that money rents became more general, it was necessary that the peasant farmer should obtain money. They could only obtain money by selling some of their produce. This applied, too, to the larger farmers who had to pay rent to the lord. The foreign merchant who brought his rare goods, fine silks, robes, jewels, spices, etc., to sell to the lords on certain days, also preferred money to goods or chattels. On the other

hand, the lords, too, needed cash for their expeditions to the King's Court. To meet this demand for money and also to enable the quit rents to be paid in cash to the Crown, mints were established at Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth. In these circumstances there arose a number of markets, in the main on the basis of the old mutual exchanges of superfluities which had occurred on rent-paying day under the walls of the lord's castle. Gradually, under the protecting eye of the castle the market became important and the lord's encouragement was certain so long as he was able to exact taxes for permission to sell on the castle grounds. Thus we find the markets at Bridgend, Carmarthen, Abergavenny, Swansea, Monmouth and other places rising to the important position which they occupied in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Handicrafts were as yet few and fairly primitive. Almost every manor village had its smithy, and in a few places small forges existed to supply the domestic demands of the market. Around both Neath Abbey and Tintern Abbey there were quite a number of small forges which were chiefly occupied in making the very simple agricultural implements then in use. As agriculture extended and these needs increased, additional forges were erected at Brecon, Pontypool, Monmouth and Caerphilly, each one supplying the near-by market.

A small pottery at Bridgend supplied the rough domestic ware, whilst the Bristol merchants brought over the finer wares. Copper pots and utensils were made at Swansea and Neath, and in all probability the same towns supplied iron ware as well. At Chepstow, a little sea-port town lying near the mouth of the well-wooded Wye valley, as well as at Swansea, a thriving shipbuilding trade existed.

A certain amount of trade was done around the coast with the English and Irish ports. Swansea, Ogmore, Cardiff, Newport and Chepstow were the chief sea-ports, combining trade with fishing. Corn, bark, sheep and wood were traded with the Bristol merchants. Unfortunately, the pirates who infested the coast had their centre at Cardiff, and this little trade was continually hampered by

them, this state of affairs continuing as late as 1686. When in that year the King demanded ship money from the men of Glamorgan, they refused on the grounds "that their ships had been destroyed by the Moorish pirates that infested the coast."

The rough cloth which the majority of the natives wore was spun by their wives and daughters in the households. The surplus wool was taken to the market to be sold to the cloth factors of Llanidloes, Abergavenny and Carmarthen. At these three places quite a thriving spinning trade was carried on by small handicraftsmen and assistants. Welsh flannel gained its traditional worth from the personal skill of these handworkers.

This is a rough sketch of the state of production in South Wales prior to the industrial revolution. No attempt has been made to give a full and detailed account, but just sufficient information has been put forward to serve as an introduction to an account of the birth of the succeeding mode of production. We have seen that each district was to a great extent self-sufficing, producing practically all the necessaries of life. The peasant farmers formed the largest portion of the population. At first they worked their small farms with the aid of their families. As the farms extended, the hired day labourer became necessary, and later the ploughman, shepherd, and cowman. Thus was created the wage-earning class in agriculture.

The payment of rent in money destroyed the old feudal ties between lords and peasants. The growth of markets spurred on production.

The handicraft tools were still owned by their users, except in the case of the small factories and works. The owner was still a factor in production, and the relation between master and assistant was a personal one. The assistant still looked forward to having a workshop of his own—sometimes inheriting his master's daughter as well. In handicraft the gulf between master and man only now appears.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH OF INDUSTRY

The rise and development of modern industry in South Wales was phenomenal. In the short space of one hundred years the district was transformed from a small peasant-cultivated area into the most highly industrialised part of Britain. Copper smelting gave the first impetus to coal mining, then followed iron smelting, which split up into three separate industries, iron smelting, coal mining and transport. This industrial revolution invaded every department of production.

The copper smelting industry, being of relatively small importance, will receive only slight attention here ; whilst iron, coal, and transport, being the " big three " of the industrial world, demand more lengthy treatment.

Copper

The district around Neath and Swansea has been from the earliest days famous as the centre of copper smelting in South Wales. In Chapter I. it was observed that a few copper works were in existence in this district as early as the sixteenth century. By the end of the seventeenth century there had been marked progress in the method, and increase in the quantity of copper production. The use of coal in the smelting process necessitated a development of coal mining, and it can be said quite definitely that the copper industry gave the impetus to the original working of coal. The writer, Waller, gives a very interesting description of the works he visited in this part of the country. He says " Carberry Price had also sailing waggons on land for the cheap conveyance of coal to the water side, which was simply the wonder of the world ; one horse doing the work of ten men, and when the wind was in favour doing the work of twenty."

In this same year, 1698, Sir H. Mackworth, owner of Neath coal levels and copper works, joined with Carberry Price to form the Mines Adventurers Co. We are told that in his Gnoll Colliery at Neath, Mackworth had introduced iron rails as tram lines, but it is more interesting to read the paragraph about the miners :

> An account was received that seventeen criminals, condemned to death, had been pardoned by the King, providing that they would, within two months, apprentice themselves to Sir H. Mackworth and Partners for five years' work in the mines. If they refused or departed from the mines, the pardon was to be void.

The kind treatment and good conditions under which these unfortunates worked was manifested in the fact that two of them ran away in less than two months. Later, the Secretary of State sent to ask them " whether the company would take a number of pirates," but the answer was " No."

At Taibach a new group of works was erected in 1727, and soon the whole district was dotted with works and honeycombed with collieries. It was from these small beginnings that there developed the greatest copper smelting district of the world.

Iron

In the year 1620, Dud Dudley obtained a monopoly to smelt iron ore with coal, this being the first successful attempt at this process. It is uncertain whether or not he made use of it at Neath. His connection with the Bristol merchants who bought the iron ware from Neath and Swansea certainly points to his being concerned in the management of the works. After the Civil War, Dudley, who was on the losing side, lost his monopoly. It appears that Cromwell vainly attempted to obtain the secret of this process, but Dudley carried it with him to his grave. The smelting of iron ore with coal was thus out of the question for many years.

In addition to the small iron forges already referred to in the first chapter, two were built in 1738 at Tredegar by " two gentlemen from Brittany, to make pots and pans,

and domestic utensils." Prior to this, Hanbury had a small works at Pontypool which, after the wood supply gave out, he removed to Clydach. At Pontypool, about this period, Edward Allgood had established a works at which was produced the famous "Japanned Ware," the secret process of which he had stolen from Bedfordshire. The works at Neath Abbey, under the patronage of the Abbey lord, had extended a great deal, as also had the others mentioned in Chapter I. Charcoal was still mainly used at these furnaces, and, as in the case of the Pontypool works, the site had often to be shifted as the wood supply gave out.

It is not until after 1756 that any general use of coal for smelting is found. This came after the improvement made by Abraham Darby, a Quaker ironmaster, of Coalbrookdale, Shropshire. He improved the structure of the furnace; made coal into coke for use instead of charcoal, and, by means of a water wheel, set in motion a huge bellows to supply the furnace with a draught of air.

The above is a summary of his achievements from 1735 to 1756, when his works "were at the top pinnacle of prosperity, producing twenty and twenty-two tons per week, and sold off as fast as made, at profit enough." This application of coal to iron smelting was discussed with astonishment and envy; and as soon as it became known that a plentiful supply of coal existed in South Wales, many small forges were erected on the edges or outcrops of the coal-field.

In 1765, Anthony Bacon, a far-seeing, retired Virginian planter, leased, from the Marquis of Bute, a strip of land, eight miles long and five miles broad, "for the purpose of digging coals and erecting furnaces." He paid rent at the rate of £100 per year. (The same land was leased, eighty-five years later, for the large sum of £20,000 per year.)

At Dowlais, in 1759, a company was formed and rented some land from Lady Windsor. In the next year they brought from Shropshire, John Guest, founder of the family of iron fame, to manage the works they had built.

In 1762 the company obtained further lands from Lady

Windsor on a ninety-nine years' lease at an annual rental of £26. Lady Windsor, with all possible graciousness, gave them the right to build furnaces on twenty-two acres of common land, on condition that they paid Morgan of Ruppera the sum of £5.

At about the same time, John Mayberry, an ironmaster of Brecon, obtained a lease of land at Tredegar from Morgan of Ruppera, and an old record says, " He spent the magnificent sum of £1,400 in building works and working coals." At Hirwain, Plymouth (Merthyr), and other places, works had been erected (see Appendix, Table I.).

To meet the needs of this activity, with its increasing number of skilled men, and its demand for improved methods of production, numerous inventions were introduced, and more or less quickly brought into general use. As in South Wales, so in other parts. Every industrial area benefited by the inventive genius of Scotch and Staffordshire ironmasters. Among these new inventions was the very simple blast engine invented by Smeaton in 1760, which quickly displaced the old clumsy bellows for supplying air to the furnace. Six years later, Cranage discovered the method of making pig iron more malleable, and in 1873, Onions started a new method of puddling at Merthyr.

There followed, in 1784, the epoch-making inventions of Cort. The first was the secret of adapting bar iron for the rollers without the use of the forge hammer. The second, in the following year, consisted of an iron bottom fitted to the floor of the furnace. Whereas with the old method, Crawshay of Merthyr produced only 500 tons of iron in 1787, with the use of Cort's patents he was able to forge 10,000 tons in 1812.

In addition to these improved methods a constant supply of motive power, enormously superior to natural or human power, was obtained by the use of the steam engine, the invention of Watt. The steam engine brought about unheard-of improvements, and placed at the disposal of the industrial capitalists an unlimited, reliable, constant and effective supply of power. Its advantages over human, animal, or natural power are obvious. Roller

mills driven by steam could cope easily with all sizes of rails and bars ; huge hammers, of hitherto undreamed-of size, could be utilised.

South Wales—situated near the sea and convenient for the importation of Spanish ore to mix with the inferior native ores ; offering a good water supply ; possessing a good supply of easily obtainable coal, and plenty of cheap sites—soon became the happy profit-hunting ground for Bristol and London merchants, Midland ironmasters and retired slave traders. Sites were snapped up and works began to appear in every valley.

In 1784, works were erected at Abercarn, and in the same year, Homfray, a Staffordshire ironmaster, built those at Penydarren. In 1789, this same Homfray leased ironworks and coal levels from Sir C. Morgan, and later built more at Ebbw Vale and Abernant. At Aberdare, a company was formed to build the Aberdare works, and by 1820 those at Gadlys were in full swing. By 1802 Nantyglo, Beaufort, Rhymney and Blaenavon resounded with the heavy clang of ironworks, and clusters of them arose around Neath and Swansea, besides the new copper and tin industries. To enumerate all of them would be monotonous, so we give a full list in our Appendix.

Enough has been said to indicate the nature of the scramble of the moneyed class at this period to share in the profits of this new industry. To become a master was now practically impossible for the worker. To obtain the means of production—furnaces, mills, steam engines, boilers, coal deposits, iron ore, limestone, leases, etc.—a plentiful supply of money was required. Whilst, under the old feudal handicraft form, it was fairly easy to obtain the usual means of producing iron, in these later times it was becoming increasingly difficult. The worker was hopelessly shut out from the ownership of the means of production. He had to work for those who were able to buy them. The gulf between master and worker became ever wider and, however thrifty the latter was, he had small chance of improving his status. Also, as industry increased and extended, and consequently brought greater returns to the capitalist, he was able to leave the function

of management to paid managers. The capitalist stood out from production, performed no labour in the productive process, and lived on the proceeds of production.

Within the actual process of production, the complete function was split into many operations. Specialisation became more and more general, and where the old handicraftsman would spend his time in getting wood and iron ore, and then in performing all the processes of smelting, the modern worker laboured solely as a miner, a furnace man, roller man, engine man, or some other particular grade. The worker became confined to a single detailed operation and, whereas one or two handicraftsmen used to perform all the work necessary, now as many as thirty men divided the process between them. In addition, the process was itself split up, at first into two connected yet separate industries, and later into three industries—iron smelting, coal mining and transportation.

Coal

It has been already noticed that up to a certain point the working of coal was dependent upon the extent of the iron industry. In almost all the leases, taken in the latter part of the eighteenth century, in connection with the erection of ironworks, the right to "dig coals" was specified. At Pontypool, in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, when the ironworks were revived, coal was worked in conjunction with the ironworks. In the Dowlais lease, of 1765, a clause was found conferring the right to "dig coals," and an old record says that the farmers for miles round, brought sacks of lime which they exchanged for sacks of coal, giving, in addition, $\frac{1}{2}d.$ It appears that as early as 1553, Mennyfee worked coal at Cwmglo in Merthyr. In the earliest years of coal working, only that coal near the surface was worked. Short levels and "coal holes" were driven, more or less horizontally, into the sides of the hills, near the ironworks. These holes were often driven without any idea of ventilation and, the farther they went into the hillside, the more difficult were they to work. When the percentage of gas became too high, the workings were abandoned and

allowed to "fall in." The coal near the surface was quickly worked away in this primitive fashion and it became necessary to reach the deeper seams. But the more vertically these holes were driven the greater became the trouble in dealing with the water which drained into them continually. At first, attempts were made to drain off the water by driving levels or tunnels below the workings, but, owing to the cost and lack of success caused by ignorance of surveying, this method was avoided as much as possible. Until such times as the ironmasters could find means to overcome this water trouble, coal production was necessarily carried on by very primitive methods.

The experience of the Cornish tin miners was helpful in solving this problem for the Welsh capitalists. Papin had invented a pump in 1688, "which enabled a boy to do easily as much pumping as has previously given labourious occupation to twenty men." About fifteen years later, a similar pump was devised by Thomas Savery, but in 1705, Newcomen invented a pump which easily eclipsed the previous ones. This was far more effective, and was based upon the idea of a piston rod worked by steam. Still, these discoveries lacked sufficient motive power, and, because of that, were quite unable to cope with the large flow of water which continually flooded many levels.

Not until after 1774, when Boulton and Watt had improved both pumps and steam engines, were the means available for keeping the coal workings free from water. The steam engine, first applied to pumping, was now applied to hauling the coal out of the levels, and with both these improvements, coal levels, tunnel-like, were driven into greater distances. As the uppermost layers were exhausted, the ironmasters were compelled to sink shafts to the lower measures of coal. Here, again, the steam engine was of invaluable service. Besides being used to haul materials in and out of the shafts, its application to boring tools, together with a knowledge of the new sciences, geology and surveying, enabled the ironmasters to obtain correct ideas of both the extent and location of these hidden coal seams. At Dowlais, Merthyr,

Neath, Pontypool—in fact, in every iron centre—the working of coal proceeded with rapidity as a result of this technical progress.

Crawshay Bailey sank a pit at Nantyglo in 1811, whilst at Tredegar, the " Dukes Pit " had been sunk five years previously. But a new tendency arose about this period, and it is important that it should be noted. The use of coal for domestic purposes was becoming more general and, by 1800, its use spread, particularly among the rich, to the large towns of Great Britain. The application of the steam engine to the textile industry, and the phenomenal growth of this industry, created large demands for coal supplies. This demand gradually freed the working of coal from the leading-strings of the iron industry and did much to aid its development as a separate and distinct industry. Instead of being a mere by-process of iron smelting, it soon became a means of direct profit. Its direct sale, as a commodity, now became the object of speculating adventures.

As early as the last decade of the eighteenth century, Chauncey Townshend, a London alderman, had leased the Birchgrove Coal Works, near Swansea, quite independently of any smelting works. In 1801 a lease of land was obtained from Morgan of Ruppera by a Bristol merchant, Jones, and with a capital of £6,000, he sank the Risca Colliery. A large acreage of mineral land was leased, at this time at Llanelly (Brecon), at 10*s.* per acre, for the purpose of working coal to supply Abergavenny and Brecon. Around Neath the Quakers were very active and obtained quite a number of leases of coal-bearing land, evidently having no objection to " black diamonds " even if they desired " white " souls.

At Pontypool, a John Barnaby had bought a large share of the Pontypool Ironworks, and so important had the coal works become, that he agreed to leave the ironworks entirely to his partner. By 1826 the Rhymney Company was formed to work coal, and out of gladness of heart, gave a site for the building of a church, whilst the next year they built a brewery to provide the church with work.

About 1830 two London aldermen, Mr. Lockett and Sir James Duke, went to South Wales in search of smokeless coal to supply the household wants of London. This visit resulted in a contract with Mrs. Thomas, owner of the Waun Wyllt level, to supply them with the entire output, at 4*s*. per ton at the pit mouth. This coal was taken to Cardiff and afterwards shipped to London, and it was from this beginning that the now extensive trade grew. A few years later similar happenings occurred at Aberdare when "A Londoner came here and took a parcel, like a cheese, of coal. Mr. Wayne entered into an agreement to supply him with 44 tons per day."

These few instances show how the increased demand affected the working of coal and established it as a separate industry. With the growth in the number of steamships, the increasing demands of industry and the needs of the large towns, coal companies were being formed in abundance to pluck the first fruits of the new industry. Pits and coal levels were being worked in almost every valley, and because of the fairly large profits capital was attracted in plenty. As the amount of available capital was able to supply the initial costs of deep sinkings, the deeper coal measures were worked. Under the ownership of Walter Coffin, the low-lying Rhondda No. 3 seam was tapped in the Dynas Pit about 1802. From this time onward the Rhondda Valley achieved its fame as a coal-producing area. At Margam, the Vivians were laying the basis of their fortune and Maesteg saw the formation of the Llynfi Iron and Coal Company.

The export trade was continually expanding, and by 1840 the shipments to London alone were 60,069 tons, while the total export was 100,000 tons.

In the coal industry, as in the iron industry, the same process of specialisation developed. Formerly the miner used to work his mine alone, as Mennyfee did in 1533. He performed himself all the processes, from hewing the coal to taking it away to sell. But by 1840 a new system had developed. The mine worker was confined to one process; he was either a haulier, hewer, timber-man, labourer, or performed some other particular job. With

this limitation of function, the worker becomes a specialist, but only at the expense of losing his ability to perform the other detailed tasks. The control of the means of production empowered the master to enforce this practice, and thus he obtained a high percentage of skilled labour from the worker. By co-ordinating the functions of all these specialised workers, the employer procured a more efficient mass of labour, and, in this way, production developed from the crude individual form to that of a highly technical co-operation.

Transport

As industry grew, so naturally the means of transport grew also. The ever-increasing supply of rails, iron bars, cannons, etc., the increasing quantity of coal which was being produced, was, of necessity, accompanied by increasing facilities for transportation.

South Wales was practically roadless. Of course, rough tracks to the markets existed, as also did the remains of the old Roman roads; but the absence of made roads is fairly certain. Since each community was practically self-sufficing, no need for roads was felt. Owing to the very hilly conformation of the district, straight tracks were impossible, and the water rushing down the mountains after the frequent heavy rains made what tracks there were into a series of ditches and mud-streams. This absence of highways resulted in the earliest ironworks being built on the banks of rivers, and small barges were used to convey the iron goods down to the coast. The works at Neath Abbey, Tintern Abbey, Pipton Forge and Monmouth are all instances of the use made of rivers.

But, as the ironworks increased in the inland areas and the iron ware increased in size, the ironmasters had to find new ways and means of transporting their wares. At first, these were strapped to the backs of mules. In 1766 Bacon was sending his iron ware down to Cardiff by convoys of mules, a boy or woman being placed in charge of five or six. Owing to the wet and bleak climate, many of the tracks were impassable for weeks at a time, and this delay did not suit the get-rich-quick Bacon—the largest iron-

master in the Merthyr vale. He accordingly promoted a scheme for building a high road to Cardiff, and by 1769 the cannon made at his works were taken down over this first high road.*

Now, although good roads continued to be made, the heavy cost of upkeep and the slowness of horse and waggon transport was too much for the pockets of the ironmasters. An attempt was made to cope with the increasing output by building canals. It was quite natural that this idea should be acted upon, as the natural waterways, the rivers, had certainly provided a cheap and useful means of transport. Thus in 1792 we find an Act to sanction the building of a canal to connect both the Eastern and Western Valleys to Newport. The Eastern Valley section ran up as far as Pontypool and passed by, if not through, about five different works. Owing to the steep gradient in the Western Valley, the canal only ran to Crumlin, and from there was connected by tram roads to the Coalbrook Vale, Blaina and Ebbw Vale Works. In the following year the ironmasters of the Merthyr district joined together to cut the Merthyr–Cardiff Canal, and in 1795 the ironworks at Aberdare was joined to this by a branch cutting. To relieve the traffic on this canal (and incidentally to share in the profits) another canal was constructed which ran from Abernant to Neath, and in 1795 Swansea also was connected to the inland works. Canals were cheap, but owing to the rapid development of industry and the difficult contour of the country, they proved to be quite inadequate, and many works remained isolated because of their inaccessibility.

In the more hilly districts particularly, tram roads had to be laid for the conveyance of the materials, but the general use of tram roads was much restricted, on account of their heavy cost. Later, however, after the application of Cort's patents and other improvements, the cost of producing rails fell, and this led to an increase in the

* It is interesting to note that Bacon lost a contract with the Government to supply them with cannon during the American War because a Captain Smythe alleged that Bacon was secretly supplying cannon to the Americans as well.

building of tram roads. These roads were about 4 feet wide, the heavy plate rails being either pegged down to long wooden sleepers or to large flat stones with holes drilled in them. Upon this pair of rails ran bulky trolleys or waggons with box-like wooden bodies fitted upon flanged iron wheels.* They carried loads ranging from 1 to 6 tons, and were pulled along by mules, but on steep inclines the self-acting principle was adopted. Their speed and the quantity of the material they carried easily exceeded that of the canal barge. Now the iron could be taken from the works right to the sea wharf without intervening unloading and reloading. In a hilly district like South Wales, this was a great advantage, and one can say that for this transport system geographical barriers were practically non-existent. This method was quite generally adopted, and soon the district presented a network of these roads. But the crowning event was yet to come; the event that would entirely free the transport industry from the limitations of human and animal power.

Quietly toiling in the works owned by Samuel Homfray at Penydarren was an engineer named Trevethic. His application of the steam engine to various tools and machines had excited general admiration. He outlined his ideas of a locomotive steam engine to Homfray, who bade him proceed with its construction. By 1804 this locomotive was on the line, and took a string of waggons from the Penydarren Works to the canal head at Navigation. This surprising feat won for Homfray a wager of £1,000 from Crawshay. Trevethic's invention, over twenty years before Stevenson's locomotive, was the turning point of the transport industry. Landowners, ironmasters, coal-owners and financiers came together, formed railway companies and began relaying the old tram roads for these new "fire engines." By 1820 all the chief centres of production were linked to Newport, Cardiff, or Swansea, and these towns developed rapidly as seaports for the export of coal and iron. As the population of the productive centres grew, foodstuffs, clothes and articles of domestic

* These roads are still to be seen at Brynmawr, Clydach, and at Pontypool.

use had to be imported, and soon the same towns became emporiums for the industrial population of the valleys.

The tram roads, or, as we now call them, the railways, instead of remaining coal and iron carriers, now performed the function of general carriers, and became a separate and distinct industry.

The same process of specialisation already noticed in the iron and coal industries developed also in the railway industry. No longer did the workman drive the convoy alone, and perform all the necessary functions; he was now a signalman, an oiler, or an engine driver, attending solely to one of the other detailed processes. He became, so to speak, but a single cog in a huge wheel, and his movements were controlled by the combined movements of the rest.

We have traced the growth of industry in South Wales and watched it develop from a quiet rural area into a human hive, a veritable hell of work. Where once the smoke from the white chimneys of the farmhouses quietly curled now belched forth the sooty flames of the furnace; and where once the pleading cry of the lambs or the tinkle of the sheep's bell was heard there now sounded the monotonous clang of the forge hammer or the noisy rattle of the rolling mills.

On the other hand, it is to be noticed that instead of being the poorest district of Great Britain, it became the richest. All eyes, greedy for profit, were turned to this new Eldorado. But whose were the riches? Not the workers'. Whilst, by 1840, South Wales was undoubtedly the richest industrial area in the country, there was nowhere such squalor, such poverty, and such degradation. Upon the backs of the workers were built the pyramids of wealth which gave to Crawshay Cyfarthfa Castle, and to the Lewises, Windsors, Vivians, Guests and others their great fortunes.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW CLASSES

For the existence of capitalist production, the existence of free workers—free in the sense that they own no means of production, no legal ties to a lord, frée to sell their labour power—is necessary. Fluctuating trade, a characteristic of capitalist society, demands that production should slacken down at some periods and hasten on at others; when the demand is great, production must increase, when the demand falls below the supply, production must diminish. To effect this it is necessary that the labourer should not be the property of the producer and that all conventional ties between them should be destroyed, so as to allow the producer—the capitalist—to rid himself of superfluous workers whenever necessary. The freedom given to the serf relieves his former owner of any responsibility for his condition. If the wage worker starves as the result of a glutted market, the responsibility does not seem to rest with the employer; in fact, the capitalist, when employing the worker, appears in the light of a philanthropist. The worker, though politically free, is an economic slave. The emancipation of the serf from the bonds of serfdom and the journeyman from guild restrictions precipitated them into a new form of bondage—wage slavery. The modern wage worker, although politically free, can exist only by selling his labour power to those who own the means of production, and to work for this class of owners he must conform to their conditions or starve. South Wales presents a typical instance of the growth of both these classes, and, having traced the growth of industry, our attention can now be turned to the development of these two classes whose existence depends upon this form of production.

The Capitalist Class

Economists who write apologetics for the present system and attempt to analyse economic questions continually lay stress on the idea that capitalists arose because they were frugal, sober persons. From this they go on to justify profits as the " claims of abstinence," the " rewards of frugality." Adam Smith says, " the frugality of his forefathers had, as it were, consecrated the maintenance of industry." Senior says, in effect, that profits are the just rewards of abstinence. Many other economists put forward the same idea, and thus attempt to justify the sharp contradiction which is so painfully manifest in society—misery and poverty on the one hand, luxury and riches on the other. They infer that the frugal, honest and diligent section of society saved the results of their labour, and that the other section, by far the larger, spent the results of their labour in eating, drinking and being merry. Thus, in order to offer some sort of solution of the economic problems of the time, the larger portion of the population is represented as being low-down, imprudent and spendthrift. What economics !

The test of the truth of these statements lies in an analysis of a concrete instance. Now, what happened in South Wales ? The capital for the South Wales industry was obtained from three main sources, and in a small degree from a fourth :—

1. Bristol and London merchants.
2. English ironmasters.
3. Financiers and stock companies.
4. Combination of successful handicraftsmen.

1. *Bristol and London Merchants.*—One would be quite safe in saying that more than half the industry was established with merchants' capital. The works at Sirhowy, Pontypool and Blaenavon were built by London merchants. The great iron centre of Merthyr owed its origin to the ex-Virginian planter and merchant, Anthony Bacon. Bristol merchants mainly built the works at Aberman, Tredegar, Risca, Dowlais, and invested in the shares of almost every company that was promoted. But how did

these men get their wealth? The Bristol merchants obtained much of it by catching negroes on the African coast and shipping them as slaves to the American plantations. Bourne says "as long as commerce with them had for its principal item traffic in negro slaves, the supremacy of Bristol was maintained." Another writer, Mrs. J. R. Green, says in *Irish Nationality*, that "by order of Parliament (1653) over 20,000 destitute men, women and children over twelve years, were sold into the service of English planters in Virginia and the Carolinas. Slave dealers were let loose all over the country (Ireland) and the British merchants did good business." What abstinence!—from moral conduct. What is true of Bristol is equally true of London, and, as an auxillary means to wealth, plundering was quite fashionable. "Merchants' capital in its supremacy stands everywhere for a system of robbery and its development among the trading nations is always connected with plundering, piracy, snatching of slaves, conquest of colonies."

The fleecing of India, the robbery and extermination of the Red Indians, the plundering and crushing of Ireland, the destruction of Dutch trade, the spoliation of the Spanish gold trade and the activities of pirates—such as those of that king of robbers, Drake—these were the sources of merchants' capital. Upon this blood-reeking mass of wealth was built, not only the industry of South Wales, but that of Britain, too. The frugal, sober and industrious persons of the economists were really the most bullying robbers the world has ever known.

2. *English Ironmasters.*—The second source was those ironmasters of the Midlands who migrated. As the export trade increased, and as it became more and more necessary to import iron ore from Spain, the Midland ironmasters found it far more profitable to remove their works nearer to the sea ports. The cost of transport, say, from Newport or Cardiff into the Welsh valleys was far less than the cost to the Midlands. Besides, in an undeveloped district rents would be fairly low. Thus we find Homfray coming from Staffordshire and building works at Dowlais, Tredegar and Merthyr. Brown of

Salop coming to Ebbw Vale and Blaina; the Darbies coming from Coalbrookdale, Shropshire, to Ebbw Vale; whilst John Guest, founder of the famous Guest family, came to Dowlais from Shropshire also.

3. *Financiers and Stock Companies.*—Under this heading the part played by joint stock companies, financiers and banks must be briefly considered. In the early part of the nineteenth century all these played a large part in financing the industrial capitalists. Joint stock companies are frequently found even in the earliest stage of this industrial development. One of the earliest, in 1759, was formed for erecting the Merthyr furnace at Dowlais. The following are the names and shares of the different persons concerned: T. Lewis, merchant, £750; T. Price, Watford, £500; R. Jenkins, Mercer, Cardiff, £250; Thos. Harris, Bristol, £750; T. Curtis, Bristol, £500; Nathaniel Webb, Bristol, £500; J. Jones, Ironmaster, Bristol, £250; I. Wilkinson, Ironmaster, Denbigh, £250; and Ed. Blakeway, Ironmaster, Salop, £250. The composition of this company gives an excellent idea of the calibre of the capitalists who dominated the industries.

At Hirwain, Aberdare, Penydarren, Melin Griffith, and at other places these joint stock companies were to be found. Individual financiers were not quite so common as the companies, yet, as early as 1784, a man named Tanner leased some works from Bacon for two London financiers, Bowser and Cockshott. By this same method they also seem to have obtained control of one or two more works. When building the works at Abernant, Homfray became short of money, so he established a new company, obtaining £20,000 for the purpose from a rich family—the Tappendales of Kent. Scale, who now owned Aberdare, also obtained a large amount of capital from this family for constructing a tram road from his works to the canal at Tydraw.

To obtain information concerning the part played by banks is very difficult, although banks existed at Cardiff, Brecon, Abergavenny, Swansea, and, it is believed, at Neath also. No doubt the instance which is here given will illustrate the tendency of the time. Crawshay

Bailey had, with his share of his deceased uncle's fortune, bought the works at Nantyglo. The surface coal supply had become fairly exhausted and he decided to sink a coal shaft. Being short of ready money he was allowed to make a large overdraft on the bank of Abergavenny. But one Saturday morning, after boring and sinking had been going on for some time with no sign of coal, the bank manager refused supplies for the men's wages that day. Just as Bailey's messenger was going away, another messenger rushed in to say that the black band, the coal, had just been struck. The manager immediately cashed the cheque and told the messenger to inform Mr. Bailey that "he can have as much money as he desires." Undoubtedly this form of financial help was generally resorted to.

4. *Combinations of Successful Handicraftsmen.*—This method of obtaining capital was really the co-operation of a few working handicraftsmen, but could only exist prior to the time when the cost of works was fairly great. Instances occur at Ynys-y-cedwyn, where four native smiths combined and bought a large furnace that had been newly built by some foreigners at Monmouth, at New Wear on the Usk, and at Llangrwyny.

These are the four main sources from which the capital was derived to build the industry of South Wales. Once having commenced operations the milch cow of profit incessantly produced returns for the capitalist. Fortunes were made with alarming rapidity and Crawshay, who only came to South Wales in 1787, died in 1810 with a rumoured fortune of £1,500,000. His son, William Crawshay, built Cyfarthfa Castle in 1825 at a cost of £30,000. To his nephews he left a portion of his wealth, and soon they had bought extensive works at Nantyglo, and in a year or so later paid £45,000 for the works at Beaufort.

The Homfray family also were exceedingly rich, owning the largest shares in about six different works. Money abounded, and by 1830 fortunes of £50,000 were quite common. The owners of this wealth wielded tremendous economic power. Through their leases, the capitalists controlled the largest part of the land of South Wales.

Also, through the ownership of the means of production, they controlled the vast industrial population. How they aspired to, and eventually won, political power must be left for later treatment. It is clear, however, that already the Crawshays, Guests, Homfrays, Baileys, Vivians, and Partridges were the real rulers of South Wales. To a great extent the old aristocrats had coalesced with the capitalists through marriage and the purchase of titles by the richer industrialists. Many of the prouder aristocrats held aloof for a while, but eventually they were forced to capitulate to the economic and financial domination of the industrial magnates.

The Working Class

It has been stated before that the existence of a large mass of wage workers is essential for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. The question now arises as to how the capitalist obtained the enormous number of wage workers which was essential for the carrying on of those industries which grew at such an abnormal rate in South Wales. It is fairly evident that the native population was insufficient for the purpose. The low degree of agricultural skill and the hilly nature of the country could support only a very small population. In point of fact, the majority of the wage workers were immigrants ; but this immigration should be more closely examined. The proletarian army of South Wales was obtained mainly from two sources, which can be classified as :—

1. Industrialisation of natives.
2. Immigration :—
    - (*a*) North and West Welshmen.
    - (*b*) Cornish miners.
    - (*c*) Expropriated English peasants.
    - (*d*) English skilled workers.
    - (*e*) Irish.

(1) The industrialisation of the native peasant holder took at least two forms. Firstly, there was the buying out of the natives from the land, which was needed for industrial purposes. As an instance of this : When Bacon went

to Merthyr and had obtained the lease of some land from the Windsors, he had to buy out those peasants who had copy-holders' rights to this land. He managed to get these peasants together and dangled "a cap full of gold" before their eyes. These poor peasants, never having seen or possessed such wealth, soon parted with their rights for a share of these sovereigns. They thought they had obtained little fortunes, and settled down to a life of boisterous drinking at the "Three Salmons." Soon they exhausted their supply of money and were compelled to seek work and wages from Bacon. Often were their despairing wails heard over their mugs of ale, and bitterly they related how they had now to carry iron ore and coal in baskets out of holes in the very ground which a little while before they had practically owned. This instance is typical of others which could be cited. Every old native family had its story of how its ancestors had been tricked by the Saesneg lawyers. But this is sufficient to give some idea of the process.

Secondly, the encroachments of the ironmasters upon the common land was a means of limiting the sources of the livelihood of the peasants. Since the introduction of the law of primogeniture, more and more peasants were driven to rely upon the common lands, and the encroachments of the ironmasters must have hastened the pauperisation of these peasants. A purchased recognition from the neighbouring lord of the manor was quite sufficient sanction for the ironmasters to erect their works. At Risca, Dowlais, Hirwain and other places, furnaces were built on the commons, and everywhere the ironmasters claimed the right to work iron ore scourings in the commons. In 1795 the Dowlais Iron Co. (Guests' interests) were summoned before Hereford Court "because they had built furnaces on the common lands and had damaged sheep walks, etc., thereby."

2. The large mass of the industrial population was alien before the end of 1840. Attracted by rumours of wonders and wealth, workers poured in from all sides. Accounts of the wonderful happenings in South Wales were carried all over the country. The peasant farmers'

sons of the West and Mid-Wales, tiring of the monotony of farm life, were attracted to the industrial centres by these tales.

The shortage of skilled labour caused wages for that type of labour to rise, and consequently this attracted numbers of men from Staffordshire, the Forest of Dean, and Cornwall. As the tin mines of Cornwall became exhausted, the tin miners were gradually thrown out of employment, and so migrated to South Wales, where skilled miners were wanted. The textile trade of the West of England also began to decline, and the coal heavers who had unloaded the coal at the coast were now free to help to increase the profits of the Welsh mine owners. The quarrymen from the slate quarries of North Wales, then as now, provided a good supply of workers skilled in rock boring, and it was these men who were mainly employed in sinking the pit shafts.

Just at this time, and continuing up to 1843, land was being enclosed on a large scale, particularly in the English counties. It can well be understood that the enclosing of 7,334,000 acres of land between 1700–1843 would result in throwing a huge number of expropriated peasants on to the labour market. It was during this period that the yeomen of England disappeared from history. From Gloucestershire, Somersetshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire, streams of these peasants flowed into South Wales to find employment.

The introduction of skilled workers was essential, particularly as new types of furnaces were built and complicated machinery was introduced into the various industries. The native workers and the immigrant peasant, without training and direction, were able to perform only the less skilled tasks. Thus, when any new works was erected, its owner generally introduced skilled men from the old iron centres. When Homfray introduced Corts' patents into his works at Merthyr, he also brought from Yorkshire a number of skilled workers and settled them with their families outside the village. When the Darbies went to Ebbw Vale from Shropshire, they took with them quite a number of their skilled

workers. When the ironmasters migrated from the Midlands to South Wales, many of their reliable workers followed them in order to obtain positions as overlookers.

Last, but not least, in importance is the great stream of Irish immigration. The despotic rule and barbaric suppression of the Irish carried on by the English Government was successful in ruining the major portion of production in Ireland. What was left after the escapades of the pillaging English soldiery was ruined by rack-rents and taxation. All this had the effect of driving millions of Irish people from their country. Many thousands came to South Wales to obtain a livelihood, and almost every mining village and iron centre had its Irish quarter.

Confined in narrow valleys, this conglomeration of people festered in misery. The Welsh natives could not understand the foreigners with their strange language and customs, and looked upon them all as enemies. The Irish, forced into a foreign land through English oppression, clung to each other with an intense clannish spirit. County men shunned county men, Irishmen shunned Englishmen, and Welshmen shunned and were shunned by them all. Often at the end of the pay day, when nationalist spirits had been inflamed into boasting in the various inns, mass free fights would take place. To organise this assembly of national hatreds would provide a problem even for a modern trade union organiser.

Briefly, these were the sources from which were recruited the proletariat of South Wales. The effects of this will be discussed later, but now let us direct our attention to the growth of the population in South Wales in relation to that of the whole nation :—

Year.	National Population.	Glam. & Mon.
1601 ..	5,000,000 ..	No figures.
1801 ..	8,892,000 ..	126,447
1841 ..	15,911,000 ..	305,556

Increasing Population

The national population between 1801 and 1841 had failed to double its numbers, whilst the population of the largest portion of the industrial unit of South Wales had

increased its numbers two and a half times during this same period. Thus the population of South Wales increased far more quickly than the national population. To take the rise of towns like Cardiff, Merthyr, and Newport would offer a far better idea of the phenomenal growth of the population and industry, as very large portions of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan were still rural.

Year	National Population.	Cardiff.	Newport.	Merthyr.
1601	5,000,000	No figures.	—	—
1801	8,892,000	2,000	1,135	7,707
1841	15,911,000	10,077 (Approx.)	12,000	34,978

Here, again, the average increase during the period of 1801 to 1841 was much greater in the industrial centres and much higher than the national increase. These two tables correctly represent the concentration of population in industrial areas and the domination of the town over the country. This regrouping of the population was a manifestation of the growth of a new mode of production, and a true measure of the relation of capitalist production to the old feudal form. It is sufficient to say that with the new form of production came a change in the economic life of the country as a whole : domination of agriculture by industry proper ; domination of town over country ; domination of money wealth over land wealth ; finally expressing itself as the domination of the old squires and lords by the industrial capitalists—in short, the rule of the capitalist class.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Employment of Women and Children

Of all the horrible things that existed in South Wales at this period, the employment of little children and women in the mines was the worst. It was an evil that strikes one with horror, more particularly when one thinks of the conditions in which they were employed. Robbed of the sunlight, never seeing the light of day in winter, and crawling like beasts along the wet slushy roads of the mines, the children of those days lived lives of bestial wretchedness. In the dark recesses of the mines, working for twelve or fourteen hours a day, the youths became twisted and stunted savages, human beasts of burden. In many cases the employers encouraged the employment of little girls and boys of four, five and six years of age ; in practically all cases they permitted it. The Commissioner says in his report that South Wales was noteworthy in this respect and was worse than any other district in the country. The following evidence taken from the *First Report of the Commission for Enquiry into Children's Employment in Mines, etc.* (1841) will give the reader some idea of what was happening at the time :—

John Richards, aged seven, collier : Has been down the pit three and half years.

William Richards, aged seven and half : " I have been down about three years. When I first went down I couldn't keep my eyes open. I don't fall asleep now; smokes my pipe " ; smokes half a quarter a week.

Samuel Jones, clerk, Waterloo Colliery : " When work is dull fathers carry the boys below when four or five years old."

William Jenkins, agent, Gellgan Colliery : " Children are taken down as soon as they can crawl."

Susan Reece, six years old, Merthyr: Been below six or eight months.

Mary Davis, nearly seven years: A very pretty little girl, who was fast asleep under a piece of rock near the air-door underground. Her lamp had gone out for want of oil, and, upon waking her, she said the rats or some one had run away with her bread and cheese, so she went to sleep. The overman who was with me thought she was not so old, though he felt sure she had been below near eighteen months.

William Strange, surgeon: "They [the people] certainly had a bad practice of taking children down as soon as they could crawl about, many as early as five years of ege."

Not only were these children employed in the mines, but often they were set to perform the most dangerous task in the mines—that is, working at the coal face. The majority of accidents occurred, then as now, at the coal face, and it was to such death-haunted places that the mine-owners sent girls and boys.

Probably it will be asked, Why did the miners allow their sons and daughters to go down the mines at such an early age? The answer is not apparent, as very little is said about the cause in the reports. But occasionally the real reason comes out in the evidence. It appears that the miners were paid their wages on a basis of so much for each tram of coal filled. The trams were distributed for filling in such a manner that a man and boy would obtain more trams than a man alone. When trade was dull and, consequently, empty trams scarce, the rule governing the distribution of trams was more rigidly enforced. So a married man, working by himself, would obtain very few trams, and as a result, very little money. Now, if he had a child whom he could take to work he would have extra trams, and thus more wages. And any reluctance of the father to allow his children down the mines for the lighter tasks could easily be overcome by the all-powerful employer.

William Skidmore, aged eight, collier: "Don't know how old I am." Father thinks he's eight. Doesn't know when he went to work; it is a long time since. (Steward says at least four years.)

William Richards, aged twelve, coal cutter: Works with his fathre; has been at work ever since he was four years old

Was taken by his father because times were poor, and he was worth an extra tram.

R. D. Andrews, overseer: "Colliers take their children to work below ground at a very early age. There is a little fellow . . . helping his father who is certainly not more than five years old. It is not infrequent for colliers now to take them down even in petticoats to claim a tram."

Elizabeth Williams, aged nine: Been below ground six months; assists to fill father's trams; does not remain under ground more than six or eight hours; does not like the work at all. "Was first taken by father because he could get an extra tram for me. A good many girls besides me work in the mines, pushing and tipping [trams]."

R. D. Richards, aged seven, collier: "Helps to fill father's coal. Sometimes works with father cutting coal. Father gets a dram [tram] for me now and then."

Henry George, seven years old: Twelve months below; assists Davy Jones to pick [dig coal].

William Freeman, aged eleven, collier: "Been working at coal six years; very hard work. I have often got hurt; have had my arm cut open twice with a mandrill [pick]. The rock fell upon father and me; I got much crushed."

John Evans, aged eight years, collier: "Father took me down to claim a tram." Has been two years below; has often fallen asleep. "Father pulls me up when he wants me."

Thomas Jenkins, ten years old: "Father took me down to claim a tram when I was six years old; have worked below ever since. I work with John Jones now, who pays father two shillings and sixpence a week for my labour. When I fall asleep they wake me up. I work as long as John Jones, from six mornings till six evenings, or three mornings till five evenings."

Evan Jenkins, Cwmdows Colliery, agent: "We have no limitations of age in our workings; many of the children for whom we allow an extra tram are taken down very young."

Ed. Evans, Dowlais Collieries, clerk: "Girls are not brought to work at quite so early ages as the boys; girls generally begin to work about seven years old, and they are few in number in comparison to the boys, probably about one-sixth. In most cases it is the extreme poverty of the parents that compels them to send their young females down to work."

Hardly any discrimination was made between the boys and girls and women, and, at the risk of harrowing the reader's feelings still further, we reproduce some evidence on this question from the reports. In the summary prepared by the Commissioner, he says that in his district the females were taken down into the coal mines, and both

sexes were employed together in precisely the same manner and worked the same number of hours; that boys and girls, young men and women, and even married women with child, commonly worked almost naked, and the men in the mine quite naked.

Hugh Owen: "Females riddle the coal and wheel above and wind below; adults only can perform this operation, as it requires great strength."

Robert Brough, manager, Begelly Colliery: "The women work very hard, above and below ground." (Captain Childs, one of the proprietors then present, stated that women worked in the mines and on the banks harder than the slaves in the West Indies.)

Ann Davis, thirteen years old: "Sister and I haul skips from the men to where the women wind; it is a good bit away. Boys and girls work together where we work. The time is long and the work very hard indeed—sad, tiring sort; and I feel very glad when over. . . . Sister and I pull six score skips daily, three score each. . . . Cannot say how many three score are, but know the men wouldn't pay unless the work was done."

Mary Reid, twelve years old, air doorkeeper: Been five years in the Plymouth mine. Never leaves till the last dram is drawn past by the horse. Works from six till four or five at night. Has run home very hungry. . . . Does not like the work in the dark.

Mary Williams, aged thirteen, Ebbw Vale: "I work the same as the colliers."

One could go on quoting extract upon extract of this type, showing how chivalry towards women in general expressed itself in relation to working-class women in particular. The rising capitalists, with the words "Freedom, Liberty and Equality" on their lips, condemned the weakest section of the working class to conditions worse than those of the American slaves.

General Working Conditions

The conditions obtaining in the mines and ironworks in the early days are stunning in the brutal disregard they show for the safety of human beings. The opening of mines and the erection of ironworks were carried on in the most short-sighted manner, and the lack of previous experience increased, to a great extent, the dangers attending both

industries. This applies more particularly to the mining industry. The desire of the merchant venturers to obtain great profits in as little time as possible was the cause of insufficient examination of mine workings, insufficiency of timber for supporting the roof and the roadways of the mine, lack of ventilation, with the consequent possibility of explosion, and, in the case of the ironworks, lack of protection against the dangers of the machines. The very low piece rates forced the workers to make frenzied efforts to execute a lot of work, and this reflected itself in the lack of consideration for the dangers which more particularly attend mining operations. Compensation for accidents was an unknown thing in those days, and as the deaths of their employees did not affect the finances of the capitalists, from their point of view it was not necessary to spend money in protecting the lives of the workers. There were plenty more to fill the places of the dead and injured.

Many instances occurred in the reports of mines being found in which there was no attempt at artificial ventilation. Time and again the evidence seemed to emphasise the fact that where artificial ventilation was resorted to, it was for the purpose of keeping the candles alight to enable the men to work, rather than to provide the miners with pure air. There is plenty of evidence to prove that mine workings were abandoned because of the accumulations of gas. Very frequently explosions occurred owing to the gas being ignited by the candles used by the miners. The accidents resulting from these explosions were horrible. In many cases one road only offered ingress and egress to the miners and if an accumulation of gas ignited nearer to the pit mouth than the point at which the men and women were working, they were trapped and often roasted alive. After some of the larger explosions, the number of deaths compelled the attention of the authorities. The resulting inquiries were conducted in a most hypocritical manner, and the blame for the explosion was laid upon the recklessness of the miners.

Inadequate ventilation affected the workers in other ways. The fœtid atmosphere, heavily laden with coal

dust, seriously affected the lungs, heart and, in fact, the whole constitution of the miner. Asthma and shortness of breath were common complaints; lungs saturated with coal dust could not function in a proper manner. Combined with the lack of oxygen, this caused a peculiar type of consumption which generally ended in the early death of its victims. The following evidence throws some light upon the point :—

John James : "The labour is excessive, and many of the young people drop off [die] from eighteen to twenty years of age of a species of consumption."

Edward Davies, surgeon, Cyfarthfa Works : "The miners and colliers, in a much larger proportion than the other workmen, become, as age advances, the subjects of a chronic bronchial affection, probably caused by the inhalation of an atmosphere charged with carbon, the smoke of gunpowder, etc."

James Probitt, surgeon, Plymouth Works : "The diseases incident to, and prevalent amongst, the miners as a class are chronic diseases of the respiratory organs, specially asthma and bronchitis."

A little more expenditure in ventilating the mines would have materially altered this state of affairs. It is quite plain that in order that the coal-owner might obtain his profits, the lives of the miners were shortened and the health of children ruined.

The piece-work system, with its low rates, compelled the workers to work at a great speed, and produced a rich crop of ruptures, sprains, and bruises which are the general results of injudicious work. That deaths were often caused by the heedless haste of the miners there is no doubt, but one has to remember that low piece rates made this haste necessary.

Beginning work at six o'clock in the morning and continuing until six or eight in the evening, the miners were exhausted before the shift was over. Accidents were much more frequent at the end of the shifts than at any other time. Exhaustion made the workers less concerned about danger, and less quick in observing its existence. Often accounts are given of both adults and children going to work at three o'clock in the morning and

not returning until as late as six, seven or eight o'clock in the evening. In addition to the ordinary twelve hours of work, overtime lasting for three or four hours was worked three or four days a week. In this long stretch of toil no meal times were fixed, the workers being forced to eat their meals of bread and cheese when the work would allow, or when their physical condition made it necessary. Indigestion, heart-burn, loss of appetite, and other ailments of the digestive organs were the results of this practice, and very often both men and children were so exhausted through lack of food and overwork that they fell asleep while at their work.

The cramped position of the miners working in low seams was bound to lead to physical deformity and over-development of some parts of the body at the expense of others. Twisted legs and gnarled arms, bent backs and pigeon chests, battered heads and short sight—these were the results of low seam work. The lack of pit drainage caused the men to become victims of rheumatism, and aggravated all the other complaints to which the miner was heir.

The total physical effect of these conditions was to shorten the normal span of life of the miner. Very seldom did he live to the age of fifty, being either killed in the mines or dying as a result of overwork combined with ill-health. The following testimony is valuable in this connection :—

Edward Davies, surgeon, Cyfarthfa Works : "The average duration of a collier's life is considerably less than that of other workmen, from the frequency of fatal accidents."

James Bowen, Pembrokeshire : "The average life of a collier is about forty ; they rarely attain forty-five years of age ; in the entire population of Begelly and East Williamson, being 1,463, forming, strictly speaking, a mining population, there are not six colliers of sixty years of age. . . ." Has not been able to ascertain, for want of sufficient data, the average duration of a collier's life in the counties of either Glamorgan or Monmouth, but it is admitted that such average duration is less than that of a common labourer.

The condition of the men employed in the ironworks were somewhat better than those of the miners, owing to

the nature of the work itself, but in regard to overwork, long hours of employment, and disregard of the necessary precautions, they were in quite as bad a position.

This disregard for the lives of the workers was an outstanding fact, and betrayed a callous indifference on the part of those in authority. Persons who were killed in the mines or works were given as much attention as was necessary to get them buried and out of the way. Even the coroner disdained either to view the body or the place of death. Sometimes as long as six or seven weeks would elapse before the usual formal and farcical inquiry into the cause of death was held. On this point the Commissioner says : " When a man dies, the viewer looks at the body, and sends for the coroner, and unless a case of suspicion is made out to the coroner he does not come, but sends an order to the constable to bury, and frequently the coroner does not attend until there are five or six cases to clear."

These were the conditions in which the great-grandfathers of the present generation were compelled to earn a living, and which caused the spirit of revolt to spring up in their hearts, manifesting itself in the riots of 1800, 1816 and 1839.

Only five years ago a particular colliery was called the " Slaughter House " by those living near it. One wonders what they would have called those death-traps which existed in their district eighty years ago. The men, women and children whose conditions we have attempted to describe are the stock from which the C3 population of these days is descended. The wonder is that they left any offspring at all.

Truck System

The payment of wages in goods was the general custom in the early days of wagedom. It was a system brought into being by the needs of the time, and for a time it served a useful purpose. It has been seen that the ironmasters and coal-owners practically colonised South Wales, and in order that the workers should have places from which they could obtain food, clothing, etc., the

employers set up provision stores. The employers were the only people with sufficient money to establish these stores, and they also had an interest in attending to the provisioning of the workers. The old native population had supplied practically all their own requirements, but as the population increased it became necessary for new means of provisioning to be found. The amazing speed at which the population increased and the extreme poverty of the people accounts for the lack of a shop-keeping class in South Wales in the early part of the nineteenth century. Therefore the provisioning arrangements were left almost entirely to the ironmasters and coal-owners, and thus, in addition to controlling industry, they also controlled the food supply of the district.

On arrival in an iron or coal centre, the poverty of the immigrants made them absolutely dependent on the employing class, and, knowing this, the capitalists made sure that the workers should trade at the company shop. Generally there were no other shops at which they could trade, and they therefore had no alternative. After working for a day or two, lack of food compelled the immigrant workers to ask for a " sub " in order to buy provisions, but, as the employer had food to sell, a note to the effect that the worker should be supplied with 5*s.* or 10*s.* worth of food was good enough. This giving of notes eventually ceased, and the worker was allowed to trade in the company's shop, whilst the price of the goods was deducted from his wages. Later, this system applied not only to food, but also to rent, beer and alcoholic drinks generally. Gradually, from being a helpful innovation, these company shops became a means of tying the workers to their employment. The price of goods at these shops was always much higher than that of commodities in the non-company shops of the market towns, often being as much as 20 per cent. higher. And once in debt at the company shop, there was little chance of ever being free to trade elsewhere, or even of being free of debt to the company ; whilst the economic power in the hands of the employers was sufficient to force the worker to buy at the company shop until this debt had accumulated. Owing

to the high prices, almost all of the workers wages would be taken by the employers in payment of the shop debts. The shop books and the works books were kept in the same office, and the day before pay day the books were checked and the debts deducted from the workers' wages. When any balance remained, it would be paid the following day, and it was not at all unusual that no balance was left. Under these conditions the worker was converted into his masters' bondsman. The following extracts are ample proof of the actual state of affairs at this time :—

John Evans, schoolmaster : ". . . Nothing can exceed the mischief of the shops ; men will go to the shops and get a pound of sugar, or what not, and take it to the nearest public-house for drink. I frequently myself take goods from the colliers instead of money ; the colliers have no money. I can't do anything else. . . . There is very seldom any balance for the working-men to receive ; they are screwed down to the lowest possible pitch." *

These extortionate prices, besides keeping the workers in debt, and therefore tied to the employers, were bound to lead to huge profits. It was fairly evident that the employers exploited the position to the utmost. Further, a monopoly of the means of transport made their position secure, and quashed attempts at competition. In the summer of 1830, a sack of flour was 5*s*. dearer in Merthyr than a similar quantity in Bristol, yet the cost of transport from Bristol to Merthyr was only 2*s*. This instance is typical of the charges made for other necessaries.

The workers attempted to obtain the removal of the system, and though many companies fought strenuously to maintain it, others allowed their shops to fall into the hands of relatives and confined their attentions to the needs of the increasing industry. The agitation of the workers reached its climax in April, 1830. Trade had been very dull and the ironmasters and coal-owners sought to reduce wages, the men replying with a strike. Unfor-

* Commission Report on Employment in Mines, 1841.

tunately, the strike was confined to those works round Crumlin. They put forward demands containing proposals for the abolition of the truck system, payment of 10*s.* each week (pays were fortnightly) and the balance of the wages fortnightly. A mass meeting of between two and three thousand workers was held at Pentwyn-mawr, and a representative of each works conveyed the opinion of his fellow-workers to the meeting. Fothergill, a prominent coal-owner and ironmaster appeared on the ground and inquired why the men were not at work. One of the workers' leaders, replying, said that the men had to complain about the truck system of paying in goods. The goods in the companies' shops, he said, were from 25 to 30 per cent. dearer than in shops in the adjoining market towns. As a result of this meeting the coal-owners of the district met and decided to " keep coal up to a fair market price, to reduce the quantity brought down, and to pay the men in money as proposed." The strike concluded, and the example fired other districts. Prior to the operation of the Truck Act of 1831, Messrs. Russell and Brown, owners of the Blaina and Nant-y-Glo Works made a proposal to their workmen that wages should be reduced 5 or 6 per cent., and also that provision prices in their shops should be decreased by 10 to 15 per cent. The terms of this offer betrayed the enormous profits made by the companies under this system. The workers, robbed of any semblance of independence, were exploited by the capitalists, not only in the expenditure of their labour power, but also in the creation of that labour power. In many respects these wage workers were on a parallel with the old chattel slave, and in some respects in even a worse position. The chattel slave was the direct property of his master, who was therefore responsible for feeding him. The wage worker of the nineteenth century was economically dependent upon his employer, yet his employer was not responsible for feeding him. The chattel slave did not receive wages, and, as we have seen, the wage worker in those days seldom received wages. Yet the ironmasters and coal-owners of South Wales were prominent in advocating the abolition of slavery—in America.

Housing

In a district where new industries are springing up and the population phenomenally increasing, the housing is sure to be very inadequate; where no systematic attempt is made to increase the number of houses, the shortage becomes increasingly serious.

It has already been noticed that the population of South Wales increased in 150 years by almost 500 per cent., amounting to 350,000 in 1841. To build sufficient houses to meet this increase seems for the time almost an impossible task, but it can never be laid to the credit of the capitalist class that they even attempted seriously to deal with the problem. The mad scramble for profits was of too great importance to allow of consideration for the health of the workers, and as long as some sort of rough shelter existed to keep them within walking distance of the works, the ironmaster and coal-owners cared not a scrap. On the other hand, it was in the interest of the owning class not to build sufficient houses, as this would have the effect of lowering the rents of those which already existed. Naturally, in all districts, the companies were compelled to build some sort of dwellings for the workers. In the majority of cases their whole concern was to build houses of a type that would last for the number of the years lease of the land upon which their works were built. The companies exploited the necessity of the workers for protection against the rigours of the climate. On this point a Government commissioner reports :—

> In many cases the iron companies had merely a lease of the estate, and have no other interest than that of making the most they can out of it. In some cases I heard of beds being so scarce that they were perpetually occupied, one gang or set of men turning in as the other turned out . . . the beds had never time to cool. I need hardly say that fever ensued, and the practice was forbidden by the employers.*

Extortionate rents were charged and the resultant profits were often as high, if not higher, than the profits obtained from the ironworks and collieries. The type of house built was not fit even to shelter dogs; with criminal

* Inquiry into State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, 1845.

irresponsibility, the ironmasters and coal-owners absolutely ignored even the merest necessities for the good of the health of the workers in the building of these hovels. Without any scruple whatever, they neglected to provide even the elementary necessities of human life, such as adequate light, air, or drainage. Speaking of Merthyr, Sir H. De La Beche says :—

> The most wretched part of the town would appear to be that known as the Cellars, near Pont Storehouse, and supposed to contain about 1,500 persons. Though so named, they are not cellars, but a collection of small houses, two storeys, situated in a deep depression between a line of road, and, under a cinder heap, a line of slag from furnaces ; the lower portion of this collection abutting upon the River Taffe. The space between these houses is very limited, and an open, stinking and nearly stagnant gutter, into which the house refuse, as usual, is flung, moves slowly before the doors. It is a labyrinth of miserable tenements and filth filled with people, many of whom bear the worst characters. One house was found to measure 10 feet by 5 feet, and 6 feet in the higher room. . . . There was a tenement of only one room, 7 feet by 4 feet 6 inches, 5 feet 3 inches high, with a bed in it, and a stinking gutter partly underneath the floor. . . . For a room 10 feet by 5 feet and 6 feet high 6*s*. a month was found to be paid by a man who inhabited it with his two children.

In the Report of 1837 many similar statements are to be found, the following being typical :—

> Even the physical condition of the people seems almost as if contrived for the double purpose of their degradation and the employer's profit. Some of the works are surrounded by houses built by the companies without the slightest attention to comfort, health or decency, or any other consideration than that of realising the largest amount of profit from the smallest amount of outlay. I went into several of this class of house in the north part of my district and examined them from top to bottom. Men, women and children of all ages and sexes are stored away in the bedrooms without curtains or partitions, it being no uncommon thing for nine or ten people not belonging to the same family to sleep together in this manner in one room. In one instance I found three men sleeping in a sort of dungeon, which was 9 feet by 6 feet in dimensions, without any light or air except through a hole in the wall, not a foot square, which opened into another room occupied by seven women. . . . An immense rent in comparison to the accommodation is paid to the company or master for these miserable places. . . . There

is neither drainage nor even light in the streets, although coal is close at hand.*

More particularly during the summer months, thousands upon thousands of people tramped into South Wales in search of work and wages. Unable to obtain any sort of permanent dwelling, they had to camp out like gipsies. In order to protect themselves during the winter, they had to build for themselves cabins and huts. In the summer these served as some sort of shelter, but were very inadequate during the ravages of the bleak winters which characterise South Wales. The four winds of heaven seem to meet and rage there, and the cold-topped hills catch the heavily rain-laden western winds which so persistently sweep the district. How these poor immigrants managed to exist in such circumstances can hardly be imagined.

Speaking of these circumstances the Commission Report says :—

> The district is particularly hilly and the houses for the most part scattered. Some are built on elevated spots, while others are near the river, where the fog and damp exist to a greater degree than in the more airy situations. . . . But perhaps the most miserable hovels inhabited by the working people are to be found in the neighbourhood of the Hirwain Works, and they derive a more comfortless appearance from the barren surface of the plain in which they are situated. Many of these are nothing more than mud cabins, in many instances a deserted cowshed converted into a human habitation ; a rude thatch forms the roof, and, apparently to avoid the storms that sweep along the plain, they are built in every hollow that can be found, where, of course, they receive the drainage of the surrounding elevation. A more cheerless spot could scarcely be found in South Wales.

Combined with the lack of housing was the complete absence of drainage and ordinary offices. Respecting these matters the Reports offer the following enlightening evidence :—

> *Drainage and Cleansing.*—In this respect the town [Merthyr] is in a sad state of neglect; with the exception of some little care in the main streets and regulation about removing ashes before the doors in Dowlais, all else is in a miserable condition. From the poorer inhabitants, who constitute the mass of the

* Education Report.

population, throwing all slops and refuse into the nearest open gutter before their houses, from the impeded courses of such channels, and the scarcity of privies, some parts of the town are complete networks of filth emitting noxious exhalations. . . . During the rapid increase of this town, no attention seems to have been paid to its drainage and the streets and houses built at random as it suited the views of those who speculated in them.*

It is fairly evident that the poorer inhabitants could not throw their refuse elsewhere, as there were no drains or "sinks." Probably even they did not like the unhealthy stench which arose from the gutters, and would have preferred to throw their refuse into properly constructed drains. Not only were they deprived of the means of removing the ordinary domestic refuse, but they did not possess even the essential means whereby they could conduct themselves decently.

The following evidence will make the point painfully clear. In answer to a questionnaire, a Dr. James replies :—

No regulations, no attention ever paid to drainage, except for a few yards nearly opposite the church ; that, however, had no influence in draining the road, but the contrary, as it rose up in the side of the road sixty yards from the watercourse it runs to. [Proper necessaries to the houses.] No place can be worse off in this respect ; scores, I dare say hundreds, of houses have no such convenience as a necessary. . . . Such a thing as a house drain was never heard of here. . . . We have no scavengers. The houses are not provided with dustbins.

Speaking of Merthyr, Sir H. De La Beche says :—

The district of Chinatown is a mere sink of thieves and prostitutes. From a sanitary point of view, the state of Merthyr is disgraceful to those who are responsible for it. The vast majority of houses have no privies ; where there is such a thing, it is merely a hole in the ground with no drainage. . . . I was assured also by people whose houses look into open spaces or fields at the back of rows and streets that persons of every age and sex are constantly seen exposing themselves. It is difficult to estimate how brutalising an effect such circumstances produce.

Again :—

The rarity of privies is one of the marked characteristics of the town. Even many recently erected houses are unpardon-

* Inquiry into State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, 1845.

able in this respect. In some localities a privy was common to forty or fifty persons, and even up to 100 persons and more.

The dirty condition of the people was often referred to, but few attempts were made to explain it, or to show its cause. Even ignoring the general conditions, had a little more attention been paid by the Commissioner to the water supply for domestic purposes, the cause of the dirt would have been remedied. No regular water supply was obtainable other than that of the rivers and canals. Both rivers and canals were badly fouled and dirtied with the drainage of the works and the use of the banks as public lavatories. In the summer months when other water supplies had dried up, these stinking streams were the only places where the colliers and ironworkers could bathe. Could any one in such conditions be other than dirty ?

Drinking water was as difficult to obtain as the water for bathing. Generally it had to be carried quite a long distance from springs on the sides of the hills. A brief reference in a report throws some light on this point. It says :—

No public water supply. In dry weather the poorer classes appear to go even to the distance of nearly a mile, waiting through a great part of the night from the numbers that flock to the spot.

In all probability, beer from a few yards' distance would be the more general beverage.

That these conditions were prolific of disease cannot be doubted, and as soon as the dry, hot season appeared, fevers would follow and take toll among the poorer inhabitants. That the general health of the workers should suffer under such conditions is easily understood, but the most outstanding fact to the owners was that out of such dwellings and such conditions a large profit was made.

The Health of Towns Association stated in the 'forties that the death rate of Merthyr, the large iron centre, was the highest in South Wales, the average period of life being only eighteen years and two months, and that residence in Merthyr resulted, on an average, in the loss of twelve years and eight months of life.

Education

During the first twenty years of the nineteenth century it would be safe to say that, as far as the poorer section of society was concerned, no schools existed in South Wales for the instruction of the young. A certain amount of religious instruction was given by the Churches, but that did little towards making the people more intelligent. A few higher grade schools existed at Brecon, Abergavenny, and Carmarthen which had been built out of the proceeds of the pillaged monasteries at an early period. But these schools were the monopoly of the rich, as the financial barrier successfully excluded the poor.

As industry developed it demanded more and more employees who were able to keep accounts and do book-keeping, and this demand was the indirect cause of the appointment of a commission to inquire into the education of the people. The reports of this commission furnish the material from which a mental picture can be drawn of the education of the working class, and what attempts were made to improve matters. The following evidence taken from a report of the inquiry of 1842 throws some startling light upon the ignorance of the people :—

Education at its lowest ebb ; it can't be worse. I should certainly be within bounds when saying that not one grown male or female in fifty can read.

Mary Evans, eighteen, blast furnace filler : Has heard the preacher speak of Jesus Christ, but can't say who He is. "I earn three and six a week ; can't say how many pence there are in that amount. . . . Do not know how many twice four can make."

John Davies, aged twelve, blast filler : Works never less than twelve hours. . . . Goes to Sunday school ; never heard of the Testament. . . . Can't say what four times six makes.

David Thomas : Thinks Jesus Christ was born in Wales and went to England. . . . Sixty pence is half a crown.

Morgan Lewis, aged nine, puller up : "Never was told about God. The sky is above and no one ever told me about Jesus Christ ; cannot say what He was."

Edward Davies, about ten years, hooker-on : "They tell me I shall go to the fire if I curse and swear, after I am dead. Can't say how many pennies in sixpence."

Mary Haddock, eighteen years old, filler: . . . Never heard of London.

Catherine Pritchard, thirteen, carrier: "Have heard of London, as my uncle is there; think it is in Bristol. I am a Welsh girl, but do not know whether I live in England or Wales."

Phillip Phillips, aged nine: Never was at school; none of the children go to school.

These few quotations will convey to the reader some idea of the mental state of the majority of the workers, and it is wise to remember this when considering the morals of the people in South Wales at that time.

But industry was growing, and companies like that of Dowlais, which had an annual wages bill of £250,000, required persons with a special arithmetical knowledge; and, as export trade developed, a knowledge of foreign languages became essential. On the productive side of the industries it became necessary that the workers should understand measurements and figures. Working to scale and plan required more than the average knowledge. The boring of cannon, and the making of machine parts and rails required, in addition, skilled draughtsmen and engineers. In short, if industry was to progress, a system had to be adopted for the education of the workers. This meant expense, and in a most half-hearted way the employers attempted to get over the difficulty by encouraging private schools.

As these schools proved very unsatisfactory, the employers were compelled by the industrial needs to erect new schools attached to their works. It was not until 1847 that another report of the educational system appeared. This report betrayed the mean and grasping methods of the employers and a few quotations from it are exceedingly interesting:—

Caerphilly, Mrs. Smith's school.—I visited this school on March 12th. When I presented my introduction to the dame, she returned it and said, "I cannot read it."

The school was held in a room—part of a dwelling-house; the room was so small that a great many of the scholars were obliged to go into the room above, which they reached by means of a ladder through a hole in the loft; the room was lighted by one small glazed window, half of which was patched up

with boards; it was altogether a wretched place. . . . The floor was in a very bad state, there being several large holes in it, some of them nearly a foot deep. The room was so dark that the few children whom I heard read were obliged to go to the door and open it to have sufficient light.

This school (at Blaenavon) is held in a ruinous hovel of the most squalid and miserable character. The floor is of bare earth full of deep holes; the windows are all broken. A tattered partition of laths and plaster divides it into two unequal portions; in the larger were a few wretched benches and a small desk for the master in the corner; in the lesser was an old door with the hasp still on it laid crossways on two benches, about half a yard high, to serve for a writing desk. Such of the scholars as write retire in pairs to this part of the room and kneel on the ground while they write. On the floor was a heap of loose coal and a litter of straw, paper and all kinds of rubbish. The vicar's son informed me he had seen eighty children in the hut. . . .

In the schoolroom which, at 6 square feet per child [8 square feet present-day allowance], is calculated to hold twenty-eight scholars, I found fifty-nine present and seventy-four on the books. . . .

The room in which the school is held is a most miserable hut not fit to shelter cattle in, and the thatched roof would be anything but proof against bad weather. . . .

In addition to the untidiness of these school buildings the Commissioner adds that very few of them had any lavatory arrangements at all.

Naturally, this type of school could not provide the requisite education. The first essential conditions, such as comfort and efficient teachers, were lacking, and, as the demands of industry increased, the "works" schools became more and more general.

At Nant-y-Glo, Blaina, Pontypool, Merthyr, Dowlais, Aberdare, and at practically every industrial centre, these schools were set up. A shed or storehouse was often made to serve as a school building, and this arrangement had many advantages for the employer. Very little expense was involved in fixing up a storehouse well enough to satisfy their educational ambitions, and, being on the grounds of the works, the employers could always keep an eye on the conduct of the schools. That the employers were able by economic pressure to compel the workers' children to attend these schools is beyond doubt.

Having suffered a severe fright during the Chartist days of 1839, the employers took to heart the remarks of the Lord Chief Justice. He said: "I can suggest no remedy to counteract a state of mind and feeling so unhealthy and diseased, and infecting so large a proportion of the community, except the diffusion among them of the benefits of religious instruction and a sound religious education amongst the rising generation, so that as the younger part of the community rises to manhood they may feel the conviction of the wholesome truth that they are bound to give obedience to the laws of their country, not from terror only, which the law inspires, but from a much higher and more binding motive, the fear of the Almighty, and from the thorough belief that the powers which be are ordained by God." Consequently, in the rules of the majority of the schools, religion occupied no small place; attempts were made to instil a docile spirit into the workers' children.

Another advantage which the employers observed and exploited can be seen in the following extract:—

> Very great fluctuations were said in most schools to occur in attendances; the periods of industrial activity being those in which the dearth of attendance was greatest.

The schools being on the site of the works, the lustier children were at the beck and call of the works' managers. When orders for work ~~was~~ were received and the work had to be speedily delivered, the utilisation of the children was resorted to, their education being secondary to the demands of the works; profit-making prevented the normal development of the child mind. When trade was brisk and prospects good, the children were taken from the schools to the works, but when trade was slow and chances of profit-making small, the children were sent back to school again. The extent to which this practice was resorted to may be gathered from the report of the inquiry of 1847:—

> I took the average age of the first class in the boys' school connected with Blaenavon Works, which I inspected, and the average was scarcely more than ten years. . . . The shortness

of the stay of the children in school is another painful feature of educational deficiency. The following are the results of my enquiry on the subject:

Less than one year	63·5
„ two years	21·9
„ three years	9·5
„ four years	3·2
More than four years	2·1

Unquestionably the average total duration of schooling in this district is more than one year. . . . The period of stay returned in the schedules was from the first arrival of the child in the school; this, however, included many intervals of absence.

From these statements it is evident that the poor children were naught but lamb-like slaves of their parents' employers. In order to produce profits, their mentality was dwarfed and stunted, and the way to a fuller life completely blocked. The parents were quite helpless in the matter, as their low wages would not allow them to keep their children at school even if they were prepared to oppose their employers' desires. The few shillings brought into the family exchequer by the children were of much importance in those days of extreme want and misery. Says the Commissioner:—

In fact the parents who allow their children to remain in school a sufficient time to be well educated must sacrifice 3*s*. to 10*s*. per week, besides the prospect of their remaining on their hands owing to their then incompetency to enter the business of which they had failed to pass through the noviciate.

The grasping greed and unscrupulous character of the employers was shown in the way the schools were financed and managed. Those schools which were built in connection with the various works were owned and controlled by the employers, but were financed by compulsory deductions from the workmen's wages. These deductions, a penny or twopence in the pound, were collected into a fund managed by the employers, over which the workers had absolutely no control. Very seldom were accounts of these funds published, and the way was thus left open for the exercise of the acquisitive proclivities of the

employers. The following extracts prove this contention :—

> Most of the large iron works have their own schools connected with the establishment. The schools are often supported by a compulsory deduction from the wages of the labourers at the works. They mulcted a penny or twopence in the pound, which frequently amounts to a large sum per annum—a larger sum than is always appropriated to the school. This system is far from peculiar to the Tredegar Company. The evil of it is that those who pay have not the slightest control over the management of the funds they contribute to, and in as much as the employer causes the school to be conducted after his own views, a portion of the contributors are sure to feel aggrieved. No account is rendered to the men, and the surplus money may go to the payment of a Church minister, the majority of the workmen being Dissenters, or it *may be pocketed by the firm and become a source of clandestine profit to the employer without any possibility of detection.* . . . I feel it my duty, however, to state my conviction, that the workmen do not derive an equivalent for the funds raised from their wages, and to which they are compelled to pay.

Even when the accounts were published the company's roguery could not be discovered, as it was alleged that these accounts contained fictitious rents and costs which were inserted in order " to blind " any person who risked being inquisitive. Where the number of persons employed was large (as at Dowlais, where 5,000 were employed), the amount gathered into the coffers of the employers as profit must have been very large. It is very interesting here to note the duel between the necessity for education and the desire for immediate profit, as if two souls dwelt within the capitalists' breast, one hankering after education and the other thirsting for profits. At some of the works medical funds and sick benefit societies were formed after this fashion, and provided a still wider field for the thieving propensities of the employers.

Moral Effects

In turning our attention to the morality of the workers in this area, we do so now with some idea of the conditions in which they toiled, and with which they had to contend. Just as a mirror reflects the object in front of it, so

does the human character reflect its environment. The barbarian mind is the result of barbarian conditions; the civilised mind, a reflection of civilised conditions. The morality of any people depends in the main upon the conditions in which they live. The morality of the people of South Wales during this period is a concrete instance of this truth. But it is not sufficient to say that people are immoral; it is necessary to show the cause of their immorality. In the Government reports of 1841–42, and 1847 the complaint was quite common that the working class were a class of barbarians, licentious and immoral. The parsons and the preachers, with their class interests, continually wailed about the irreligious, loose and dissolute lower classes of South Wales. With very rare exceptions did they ever make an attempt to point out the cause of those moral and mental failings. Frequently the ironmaster and coal-owners, with smirking respectability, railed against the immorality of the workers, particularly when some man stole a few pounds of coal or an old piece of wood. Through all these superficial moral condemnations it is necessary to penetrate, and at the same time to remember the relation of morality to environment.

Working in the filth of a mine or in the inferno-like ironworks for twelve or even sixteen hours a day left no time for mental reflection, stunted and cramped finer feelings, and made of man, woman and child dehumanised beasts. All the energy of the worker was absorbed in body-racking labour, and left none with which to strive after higher things. Crawling about in the dark bowels of the earth, with eyes and body strained, doing degrading work, the character of the miners from their early childhood was stamped with the mark of the brute. What else could be expected? The mad haste necessary to obtain a wage, the curses and oaths following the cuts and bruises caused by falling debris, and the wails and groans from more serious accidents, the monotonous lengthy labour and the cruel exactions of the more brutal foremen were bound to result in the creation of human machines, physical brutes robbed of all human qualities. The overworked body is

always accompanied by the undeveloped mind, and the energy necessary for the checking of animal instincts is destroyed.

Because pain had become their constant companion, it is natural that they should lose sympathy with the pains of others, and consider them a matter of course. That promiscuous intercourse was general cannot be denied, but at the same time it can be quite understood. A stunted mind always tends to over-indulgence in sexual matters, but the darkness of the mines and the nakedness of man, woman and child, owing to the heat, not only offered opportunities for that indulgence, but greatly assisted it. Having to sleep nine and ten in one room, irrespective of sex, promiscuity was the logical consequence, especially among the people, who had neither education nor living conditions fit for human beings.

That infanticide should follow such conditions is only natural, and more particularly so when it is remembered that only starvation wages were paid. If a girl of sixteen has to work twelve or fourteen hours a day to keep herself, it cannot be expected that she would welcome the burden of a child. Her economic conditions would almost compel her to rid herself of the child. Vice, bastardy and infanticide were the natural results of such conditions.

The employers hardly moved in the matter, and even denied the luxury of the idle Sabbath to them, for fear, perhaps, that the workers might have time to think. Whilst this state of things lasted education was entirely out of the question, and only when the employer was wise enough to see that a religious education would make the workers more docile did they introduce the Sunday schools and grant money and land for the building of chapels. Until then the employers denied the right of rest, recuperation and mental development to the workers, and by overwork destroyed their moral balance.

The insanitary condition of the workers' dwellings, also, was bound to affect their character. The disregard of personal cleanliness and the general lack of remedy for the filth and squalor on the part of the workers can only be realised in relation to the surrounding circumstances.

What housewife could hope to keep her household linen clean if she could discover water and washing room only on the side of a dirty stinking river or canal, or, as ofttimes happened, had to carry the necessary water from a spot half a mile or more distant? In the earlier days this, too, after twelve hours' work in the mines or works. To keep a hovel clean after twelve hours' labour is too much for human endurance, whilst, even if it were possible, it was at the cost of laborious toil up the hillside for water. The lack of drainage and scavenging made the position of the wives and daughters almost impossible as far as household cleanliness was concerned. Leaking roofs and earthern floors combined to make the floors of the houses into stinking muddy pools; and what woman could possibly keep such places clean? Even if they desired to do so, in the end they would be compelled to give up in despair by conditions over which they had no control.

As with household cleanliness, so too with personal cleanliness. In the summer the grimy colliers were often compelled to use the river, bearing the works filth and dirty mine water, in order to obtain a bath. The women and girls, with more decorum, perhaps, than the men and boys, would find it still more difficult to obtain baths. Through the lack of privacy, owing to the overcrowding of the houses, and also on account of the inadequate water supply, ablution of the body was rarely undertaken. After the laborious toil in the mine or works, no one would feel energetic enough to travel a mile or so up the hillside to fetch water in order to wash. Personal cleanliness was impossible under such conditions, and the filthiness of the people is not to be wondered at.

The general exposure of the person, owing to the lack of privies, not only shocked the parsons, but also created a lack of self-respect and what they were pleased to call "moral decency." That under these circumstances people would drink to excess is not to be wondered at. Boys and girls, men and women found their only social intercourse in the glare and lewd glamour of the beer-houses. That the truck system extended even to beer is beyond doubt, and almost every works agent owned a

drinking den which the workers had to patronise in order to obtain and keep their jobs. To keep the workers continually in want and without cash was one of the objects of the majority of the employers, and the following quotations are of interest in this connection :—

A respectable inhabitant of one of the mining parishes told me that one or two benevolent ladies exerted themselves to establish a provident society for the purpose of encouraging the men to reserve something from the spirit and beer-house and lay it by for the day of sickness or want. They applied to the proprietor of some large mines in the place, who employed a large number of these men, for contributions and patronage. "Indeed," he said, "I cannot give you either, for if I did I should be arming the men against myself, and enabling them to strike for wages. I want them to spend their earnings and not to hoard them." I heard from others in whom I had placed confidence that the desire to deprive the men of striking for wages and to subjugate them to their employers is said to animate their conduct, and it appears even more at the root of the truck system than the immediate gain which springs from it. . . . In one part of the district alone I was informed that there are eighty private houses where spirit is sold without a licence. . . . Wages are constantly paid at the public-house, and such an unblushing tolerance of the invitations to drunkenness abounds that I feel almost justified in believing that, could the present system be abolished to-morrow, the majority of the ironmasters would not be likely to aid its removal.

After considerable enquiry and much conversation on the subject, I am persuaded that the same motive in effect protects the spirit shop. The public-houses swarm, and it is not easy to ascribe the extent to which these outrageous temptations to drink are allowed to multiply with impunity to any other cause than a wilful connivance on the part of those who are morally bound to check them.*

That the people lived in a state of barbarism and were wild brutal beings can easily be believed ; the only wonder is that they retained any human character. The desire of the employers to keep the workers without the means of attacking them is clearly to be seen in the evidence of the various Governmental documents. If the workers were extremely degraded and dissolute, what can be said for the employers who caused this degradation and immorality in order more effectually to control the workers ? It

* Commission Report on Education, 1847.

cannot be denied that the employers made it practically impossible for the workers to live as ordinary human beings. The evidence against them is conclusive. They disgusted even the reformed (capitalist) Government which they had striven so hard to obtain. Says the Commissioner :—

> Evil in every shape is rampant in this district ; demoralisation is everywhere dominant, and all good influences are comparatively powerless. They drink to the most brutal excess, especially on occasions which I will endeavour presently to describe. [He refers to pay days, when the wages were paid in the employers' or agents' beer-houses.] The body and habits of the people are almost as dirty as the towns and houses of the swarthy region in which they swarm. The people are savage in their manner, and mimic the repulsive rudeness of those in authority over them. . . . Everything centres in and administers to the idolatry of profit ; physical strength is the object of esteem, and gain their chief god. I regard their degraded condition as entirely the fault of their employers, who give them far less tendence and care than they bestow on their cattle, and who, with a few exceptions, use and regard them as so much brute force instrumental to wealth, but as nowise involving claims on human sympathy. I am aware that I have used strong language on this subject, but I am more than fortified by strong facts.*

Yet that class which was mainly responsible for the conditions which produced such degradation caroused at the Cyfarthfa Castles on the one hand, and introduced Sunday schools on the other. Their subscriptions went regularly to the missionary societies for civilising the heathen, and as regularly they continued heathenising their workers. The same economic arrangement which produced the wealth to dower the capitalist's daughter when she married into the aristocracy also produced the poverty which caused working girls to resort to infanticide. Houses of correction, workhouses, chapels, imitation castles, mansions and wretched hovels grew up together, and the pomp and finery of the new capitalist class flourished on the degradation and misery of the worker.

* Commission Report on Education, 1847.

CHAPTER V

CLASS MOVEMENTS

BEFORE beginning to analyse and interpret the movements which appeared during the period under our observation, it will not be unwise to say a few words upon the guiding principle which leads to our interpretation. This guiding principle can be summed up in the following words :—

That in every historical epoch the prevailing method of economic production and exchange and the social organisation necessarily following forms the basis upon which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that period.

Movements can be explained only in relation to the conditions in which they have their roots, and much confusion has been created by historians attempting to interpret events as things in themselves—that is, out of their relation to the prevailing conditions which cause them. In dealing with such movements as the Reform Agitation, which ponderously thundered the abstract terms Freedom, Liberty, and Reform as its creed, this guiding principle is essential. Propagandist waves of freedom are generally the outcome of industrial needs. They demand freedom for the expansion of the new method of production and refuse freedom to old methods and to their opponents. Political freedom as a demand has always meant freedom for a class, and necessitated the subjection of other classes.

Having, in this little work, consciously applied this key principle, and consequently having already dealt with the development in economic production and exchange, we are now free to trace the origin and growth of those movements which found their cause and basis in the altered economic methods. The rise to economic power of the

capitalist class has been followed ; it is now necessary to examine its rise to political power.

In order that any new form of production may develop into the universal form, it is essential that the State should attend to its needs and give it legal assistance. The assistance which the State gives to new methods of production and to new industries is of great value. The social institutions of any particular society function in the economic interests of that society, and when the method of production begins to decline those institutions tend to bolster it up. A new method of production, therefore, has to contend not only with the competition of the old method, but also with the opposition of the existing political and legal institutions. Institutions, like habits, have a knack of existing long after the original necessity for them has disappeared. It is the forceful overthrow of these institutions which comprises a political revolution. The change from semi-feudal production, in South Wales, to the capitalist mode of production was the economic or industrial revolution ; the change from the rule of the old landed proprietors to the rule of capitalists constituted a political revolution ; the combination of both, as they actually occurred, forms the social revolution from feudalism to capitalism.

But we have seen that the economic freedom of the capitalists depended upon the wage slavery of the newly created working class. Grandsons of the yeomen of England, the free Irish tribesmen, and the expropriated natives, hated the new servitude with the bitterness of " free-born " men, and expressed their hatred in various ways. Dislike of servitude and the wretchedness of their new conditions gave rise to " grave unrest " and " disgraceful outrage." That outrageous conditions should give rise to outrageous activities is not surprising. The horrible conditions described in Chapter IV. were hardly likely to make the workers look at the world as if it were a tea-party. When we remember their conditions, no defence of their violent actions is required.

The varied elements forming the new working class, the mixture of Irish, Welsh and English prevented solidifica-

tion and organisation for a long while. The cohesion of the earlier movements was largely due to economic pressure from without. With these early protests of the workers the capitalists had to contend. Until they had firmly established their economic position, until they had squared their accounts with the restlessness of the workers, they were not free to attempt to wrench political power from the hands of the landed proprietors.

Early Protests

In order to deal with the protests of the workers against their conditions, we find an organisation of capitalists shaping itself. Our concern in this section is, however, with the early activities of the workers, and we shall therefore, just touch on the formation of this organisation, and pass on to consider the actions of the working class.

> The organisation founded by the ironmasters of South Wales met at Abergavenny, and it was agreed to hold such meetings quarterly, and to call them the "Welsh Quarterly Meeting." Members to pay £1 1*s*. per year. . . . Each member was [also] required to pay 2*s*. for refreshments.

Thus, according to Wilkins, arose the Union of Ironmasters in 1800. That a separate organisation of coalowners did not arise at this time, is quite intelligible, as both the iron and coal industries were practically in the hands of the ironmasters, and the split between the ownership of each did not arise until much later. Unfortunately, no copy of the rules of this organisation is available, but that they organised to control markets, arrange prices, and regulate wages is undoubted. In those days, when trade organisations were illegal, this association existed unmolested, and was effectively used to lower workmen's wages, control supplies and regulate prices. The capitalists were able to see that unity meant strength, and that co-ordinated efforts meant higher profits, lower wages, and regulated markets. The South Wales capitalists had to compete against the Staffordshire, the Scotch, and other capitalists. One group of capitalists had to compete against other groups, and this gradually compelled the

capitalists to organise as groups, and thus grew up the group organisation of South Wales.

The worker being but a single cog in a large machine, could not see the wood for the trees—that is, he could not see his class interests for a mass of individual interests. Their antagonistic national feelings, their utter ignorance and helplessness, caused the workers to be hopelessly divided. The working class was like a new-born babe, unconscious, organically weak and consequently practically helpless. Conscious action was foreign to it, and it only reacted to the sharp irritation of its more extreme grievances. Lacking the opportunity to study its position in relation to that of the rest of society, its forms of organisation developed much later than those of the capitalists.

A sharp irritating pin-prick, more violent than previous ones, roused it to action in the year 1800. The Corn Laws of 1773 had resulted, together with the failure of the crops, in the price of wheat reaching the abnormal height of 113*s.* 9*d.* per quarter. In the very thickly populated areas, like South Wales, great difficulty was experienced in obtaining supplies of food even at this price.

The local company shops exploited the situation to the fullest extent. Circular pieces of pasteboard were given to the workers as wages, and by applying to the company shop they could have goods to the amount stamped upon the pasteboard. Owing to the fact that the workers could only "spend" their pasteboards at the company shop, the managers were able to charge the workers the highest prices for the goods. In these shops as much as 15*s.* was charged for 28 lb. of flour, 7½*d.* per lb. for salt, and the charges for other goods were as proportionately high. The position became desperate, men had to work with but very little food, and often when they had these pasteboards no food could be obtained at the shops. It was patent to the workers that they alone suffered the shortage. The capitalists owning the supplies at the shops were sure to draw their normal quantities before supplying the workers; at any rate, the workers thought so. This circumstance drew from them a riotous protest.

Little information about this incident is obtainable, but the few available facts point to the pillaging of the company shops and a general distribution of the goods. The military were called in, and the Cardiff Cavalry, 2nd Dragoons and the Enniskillen Dragoons were given the opportunity of showing " great dexterity "—against unarmed bands of workers. After a few skirmishes the rioters were routed, and the continued presence of the soldiers was sufficient to maintain law and order, or, in other words, to deter the workers from demanding their fair share of the available food supplies. Numerous punishments were meted out. Aaron Williams, labourer, and Samuel Hill, collier, Merthyr, both of whom figured prominently in the riots, were hung on the gibbets as a reminder to the workers that in times of food shortage their employers must be fed, even if the workers and their children should starve.

After 1801 the price of wheat fell considerably, trade revived, and both these factors made for a period of peace. The antagonistic nationalist sentiments again found expression, and for the next nine years very little activity was directed against the employers.

Under the influence of the Corn Laws and bad harvests, the price of wheat in 1810 rose almost to the price which had obtained in 1800. Flour had risen to 14*s.* per 28 lb., and other goods were proportionately dear. At the same time a general depression occurred in the iron trade. The price of iron fell from 12*s.* to 10*s.* 6*d.* Sir John Guest, who owned the Dowlais Works, gave a month's notice to the men of a reduction in wages. In ordinary circumstances the wages paid were only pittances, many of the workers receiving parish relief in addition in order to support themselves and their families. The abnormal food prices and the threatened wage-cut provoked the first organised attempt at striking. On the night following the expiration of the notices, the workers met in a room in the Dowlais Inn. After some discussion, it was decided that each one should take an oath not to work for the reduced wages. Without a strike fund, lacking solid organisation, and with no possibility of obtaining food from the company shop,

they had, indeed, undertaken a difficult task. Parish pay was quite out of the question, as in most cases this was controlled by the ironmasters in their capacity as magistrates.

During the first fortnight the workers attained solidarity and the works were brought to a complete standstill. Guest was becoming irritated by this new movement, and resorted to taunting them with their misfortunes as he met them on the roadways. To the more militant section he was in the habit of saying that they need not hurry back to work as he could afford to wait six months, whilst to the weaker men he offered the best jobs if they returned. The majority of the workers soon felt the lack of food and of organised support, and the bribes of that " Pillar of Wesleyanism " gradually broke up the strike. After the first fortnight the men dribbled back to work, and at the end of five weeks the strike was over, and the workers had accepted the reduced wages. The presence of the military had prevented the workers from using violence, and as trade revived the old wages were restored and slightly better conditions obtained.

This prosperity in the iron trade continued until the crisis of the later portion of 1815 and 1816. In the meantime, the regularity of the work attracted the large streams of immigrants to which we have referred in another connection. Thousands upon thousands of people poured into South Wales from all directions. This led to a surplus of labour power, to the great disadvantage of those already employed. The effect upon wages was great, the employers being enabled still further to reduce their wages bill. Well did they know how to pit the Irish, who had been used to a low standard of living in their own country, against the native and English workers. The fight to maintain their wages in face of the wage-cutting Irish led to many quarrels in which picks and shovels were the most forceful arguments. The unemployed continually wandered around the works, making those employed there more cautious in their attitude towards the " boss." Discipline in the mine and workshop, under such conditions, was easily obtained, and individual wage-cutting

was very frequent. " If you won't do the work, and do it well at that wage, there are plenty more outside who will do it for less " were the words flung at the workers.

However, the general prosperity in the iron trade and coal trade in 1814 enabled the majority of the immigrants to be employed. But production increased too rapidly, and by the end of 1815 the supply of iron had outstripped the demand. Throughout the country the effects of the slump were evident, most of the works being idle, whilst others worked only half-time. The works in South Wales were able to keep going owing to the cheap supply of labour and low transport expenses. This had the effect of drawing to South Wales a large number of those iron-workers who had been thrown out of work in the English iron centres. Taking advantage of this circumstance, the Welsh capitalists decided to lower the wages. The existence of the large numbers of unemployed prevented the workers from striking, and the reduction was accepted with some grumbling but no struggle.

Owing to the reduction in wages, the Welsh ironmasters were able to sell their iron at fairly low prices and thus monopolised what little trade existed. The food prices continued to rise and the slump in trade went on. The English and Scotch ironworks were still idle, and the emigration of workers to South Wales continued.

The Welsh ironmaster now saw a chance of completely ruining the other ironmasters who competed with him. By lowering the price of iron still further, they could capture all the trade and put their rivals out of action. The existence of unemployed would enable them to reduce wages once more and sell their iron at a lower price without a loss of profit. Speaking of this attempt, the editor of *The Times*, October 28th, 1816, said : —

> With respect to the original cause of these unpleasant events, we have received many communications which prove at least that some further enquiry is necessary. The Staffordshire manufacturers plainly accused the ironmasters in Wales of having reduced the price of iron, and consequently the wages of the workmen, solely with a view to ruin their rivals in trade.

This attempt to lower wages a second time produced con-

sternation amongst the workers. The rising price of food made the position worse. The workers were desperate, their children were starving, everything seemed hopeless, and rather than slowly starve they spontaneously decided to take the only form of action which seemed possible. It may here be noted that in all probability the workers had, in a vague way, already realised the futility of small local strikes, for now they are to be found extending the movement, as far as possible, to the whole industrial area of South Wales. This movement gained much attention, and the following report, which appeared in *The Times*, October 26th, 1816, brings out the main features :—

In consequence of the depressed state of the iron trade, the proprietors of the Tredegar Iron Works gave notice to the workmen on Monday se'nnight, that a further reduction in the price of their work must take place. The workmen, who a few months ago could have subsisted on what they had, in consequence of the rapid advance in the price of the chief article of their provision, were driven almost to despair by this intelligence; they concluded that nothing but misery awaited them, and came to the desperate resolution that it was better to seek redress by tumultuously assembling than to work. Under this delusion they left the works and proceeded in a body towards Merthyr, with a view of learning the inclination of the men there. The proprietors at Dowlais Works, knowing their coming, instantly swore in a number of special constables, armed them with pikes, and placed them in the pass adjoining the works, near the dwelling of Mr. Guest, who, with others, being armed, posted themselves at the window. When the men from Tredegar and Sirhowy came to the place, finding themselves opposed by an armed force, they seized some of the pikes from the special constables, and broke them in pieces. The constables fled, but during this some person in the house fired and wounded several [workers], some severely, one of whom has since died. The men, however, proceeded to the works, stopped the blast at the furnaces, and, being joined by many others, went to Penydarren and Merthyr, where they did the same, and remained there all night (Thursday).

On Friday they returned to Tredegar and Sirhowy, and inquired minutely at all the houses for all the workmen, and for bread and cheese, which was served out to them from the shop of the proprietors. Their numbers being increased to several thousands, they proceeded over the hills to Beaufort Works, where they asked the men if they were satisfied with their wages and employers, to which the men replied in the

affirmative. Their wages were low, they said, but their masters kind, and used them well in the shops. On this they gave them three cheers, and departed for Ebbw Vale, to the works of Messrs. Harfords. Here a few joined them; the blast going to the furnaces was, however, stopped, but no violence was offered to the employers. From thence they proceeded to Blaenavon (Messrs. Hill and Co.). Mr. Hill endeavoured to prevent them from doing any mischief to the works by reasoning with them and offering temporary relief. Their reply was they wanted food, that wages were not sufficient to support them and their families, and they wished to be sent home to their parishes. Here they were supplied with bread and cheese, and Mr. Hill, commiserating with their wants, ordered them some beer, but they refused to partake of it, saying while they were sober they knew what they were doing, but if they should get intoxicated they might be guilty of what they might afterwards be sorry for. They remained there all night, and did no further injury than stopping the blast furnaces. On Saturday morning they proceeded to Llanelly, and acted there in the same manner. They now came across the mountain towards the coal works in the neighbourhood of Crumlin, Newbridge and Abercarne, with a view to learn the state of the men's mind there. Their numbers were now increased from 10 to 20,000, but as night came on they separated. The military that came into Newport on Friday night were forwarded towards Merthyr on waggons and other vehicles, and arrived there on Saturday evening; but no violence has yet been offered on either side. The cavalry which went from Cardiff have been recalled, and such troops as have arrived since have been sent up to the works, and a detachment to Pontypool, but at a late hour last night the men were still assembled in different places, 300 to 500 and more together.

Accounts have come from Pontypool to-day (22nd) that the military were called up early this morning to proceed to Blaenavon, where the men employed had shown symptoms of acting in concert with those who had been there on Friday evening. This evening's accounts are that they are chiefly among the collieries, that a troop of cavalry from Swansea is among them, but no violence offered on either side. Mr. Moggridge and other gentlemen have been among them since Saturday until this afternoon. Two or three from each colliery accompanied them down to Bassere village [probably Bassaleg] to a meeting of the magistrates.

This apparently was a meeting of ironmasters and magistrates, and it resulted in a withdrawal of the reduction of wages notices. This marks the first large successful strike of the Welsh workers. The fact that the wages

reduction proposal was dropped gives further support to the allegations of the Staffordshire ironmasters.

The numerous letters sent by local ironmasters to Sidmouth, at the Home Office, clamouring for the aid of the military, betray the panic they were in, and also the desperation of the workers. After peace had been restored and the men had begun work again, the expulsion of the men's leaders from the district was resorted to. Most of the workers had to apply for parish relief to augment their wages in order to enable them to maintain themselves and their families. This gave to the local magistrates the power to remove any applicant to the place of his birth, a power which was convenient for removing the active spirits and keeping the workers in check.

A slow and painful process was the apprenticeship that the working class served in trade union organisation and tactics, and many, many bitter struggles had to be gone through before it understood the correct methods of defending itself, to say nothing of attacking the great problem of working-class emancipation. These early expressions of dissatisfaction were unconscious ones, blind and instinctive. It was like a man in a dark room struggling to find the door. He tries first one way and then another, and, after failing to find it for some time and perhaps becoming confused, he eventually reaches the door and with it the way out. It may be objected, however, that this man was conscious of the object of his search, but that the workers at this period were not. The objection is quite valid, as the workers had no conception of any new order, except, perhaps, in heaven.

Reviving trade and regular wages soon brought general tranquility, and it was not until fifteen years later that the workers of South Wales made such another mass protest against the system under which they groaned and laboured.

Political Currents, 1829–1832

Following the revolt of 1816 up till about 1830, very few, and those very small, defensive fights were put up

against the employers. During the general prosperity of trade the workers were fairly tranquil, and it was only during the intermittent periods of depression that they showed any activity. During these depressions, as in 1826, the workers' wages were reduced and the "truck system" made more oppressive. On a number of occasions the military were called in to suppress the strikers. But during the years 1829–1835 there occurred a continual series of these revolts, which were, in the main, defensive movements mingled with political vapourings.

In 1829 a long period of depression began. Wages were reduced and men dismissed from employment, whilst most of the collieries were working short time. The local capitalists attempted to maintain their ordinary rates of profit by further fleecing the workers in the company shops, and this general attitude combined with the effect of bad trade was the fundamental cause of the "many outrageous disturbances" which characterised the following years.

> This practice of paying workmen in truck, or in some other way than money, is supposed to have been at the foundation of all the disturbances between master and man which have afflicted the mining district of Monmouthshire for the last twenty years, and it is well known that it is the cause of those secret societies and unions upon oath, which is at this moment taking place to so great an extent amongst workmen in the clothing manufactories of the counties of Wilts, Somerset and Gloucester.*

This warning from the "mirror of capitalist opinion," however, was not heeded, and the workers continued to suffer varying degrees of oppression, as trade was either brisk or depressed. The depression in trade became worse, and the *Merlin*

> regrets to hear that men belonging to the Varteg Ironworks are standing out for wages, and that a spirit of insubordination and outrage has manifested itself among them. On Friday and again on Monday a great number of them paraded the streets at Pontypool in a riotous and disorderly manner, and rescued from the civil power a man who had been apprehended as the ringleader.†

* Monmouthshire *Merlin*, June 29, 1829.
† *Ibid.*, Feb. 13, 1830.

Everywhere the workers were restless, stealing and robbery were common, until at last even the local magistrate, who was also a coal-owner, presented a petition to the Government appealing for the abolition of the truck system :—

To the Honourable : The Commons, etc. . . . the petitioner humbly sheweth :—That for twenty years past your petitioner has been acting magistrate for the county of Monmouth, in the mineral and other landed property of which he is materially interested, as well as that of the adjoining county of Glamorgan, for which he has long been in the commission of peace, and as being also the only resident magistrate in the upper division of the hundred in which he lives not personally engaged in the trade thereof, has had and still has, numberless opportunities of truly and intimately knowing the state and circumstances of the great labouring population situated therein, and in the adjoining mining districts of those counties. That great as certainly is the pressure of the times upon the labouring classes, your petitioner is thoroughly convinced that the distress arising therefrom is grievously increased and the peace of the county greatly endangered by the pernicious practice, which of late has too generally again obtained, of masters paying their workmen in goods instead of in money, which your petitioner has reason to know from his own personal knowledge, with the exception of one instance only, has been the cause of all the disturbances of the public peace, which have occasionally for many years convulsed the mining districts in which your petitioner resides. And although this mischievous and oppressive practice was by the Acts 57 Geo. III., c. 122, and 58 Geo. III., c. 51, repressed and nearly annihilated your petitioner regrets to add, has of late, both in the ironworks and collieries of his neighbourhood (with some few honourable exceptions), been generally revived, and is at the present time enforced with greater vigour and to a greater extent than ever. That in consequence of this monopoly of the custom of their workmen, the regular tradesman and the shopkeeper have been unable to carry on their concerns without giving a ruinous and fatal credit. Your petitioner, therefore, alike impressed with a sense of the urgent necessity of the case, due regard to the dictates of humanity and justice, and to the peace and tranquillity of the county, humbly but earnestly implores the prompt interference of Parliament on behalf of the industrious classes of society . . . and (also that) all cases of appeal from the convictions of magistrates in matter of dispute regarding wages between masters and their workmen, shall be subject to the same rules in every respect as similar cases heard and determined by magistrates out of sessions. . . .

J. H. Moggridge.*

* *Merlin*, April 3rd, 1830, and H.O. papers.

Hardly had this petition reached the Home Office before another disturbance occurred. On April 10th a report appeared in the *Merlin* that a large meeting of workers had taken place at Pentwyn Mawr (a spot between Crumlin and Blackwood). The price of food was the main subject of debate, and whilst the workers were discussing the situation, the chief local employer rode up to the meeting and inquired why they were not at work. One of the workers gave as a reason :—

> The truck system of paying in goods instead of money, particularly in the case of articles of food, for which they were made to pay from 20-30 per cent. dearer in such shops than in any other shops in the adjoining market towns.*

The men then proposed that their wages should be paid in money, 10*s.* per week, and the balance fortnightly. Fothergill, the employer, said he would consider the proposals and lay them before a meeting of the owners. Consequently, on the following Wednesday and Thursday the employers met and agreed to " keep coal up to a fair market price ; to reduce the quantity brought down ; and to pay the men as proposed."† The men had won the day, and at these particular mines the truck system was abolished. But what the employers failed to obtain by the raising of prices they attempted to achieve by a more direct method. No sooner had the men gone back to work, than an effort was made to split their ranks by giving notice to the colliers at Crumlin of a reduction in wages. Had this succeeded no doubt its application would have become general, but the men probably anticipated the move, for at their meeting plans were formed for dealing with it. It was decided that no one was to work at reduced rates, and that if notice was given to any section of a reduction of wages a mass meeting of the whole district should be called. Accordingly, the notice of a reduction at Crumlin resulted in a general meeting of the workers in the early days of May.

> A meeting of the whole was appointed to take place yesterday at Crosspen-main, where they assembled quite peaceably, and

* *Merlin*, April 3rd, 1830, and H.O. papers.
† *Merlin*, April 10th, 1830.

where the matter was discussed, by one man from each works coming forward to express the sentiments of the men on the subject of wages. . . . When it was finally agreed upon by the whole body that those men should not go to work at the reduced price offered, and that if they failed to find work at other collieries that every man should be paid a certain sum per week, according to [the size of] his family, from a fund to be raised amongst themselves—the money to be paid to the unemployed every Friday afternoon. Collectors for each works and a treasurer for the whole were appointed.*

In these loose organisations are found in embryo all the main characteristics of the miners' unions of to-day : the mandated delegate, the sympathetic strike, mass meetings, strike pay, and a method of paying it which the miners of to-day have only recently compelled the employers to adopt in paying wages. A slight revival in trade soon brought the strike to an end, the employers capitulating. The dispute over, this loose form of organisation disappeared, and it is not until twelve months later that it is again found. This slight revival in trade continued throughout the summer of 1830, and produced a short lull in this stormy period. However, towards the end of the summer trade again became depressed and very bad times set in. Those ironmasters and coal-owners like Crawshay and Fothergill looked with envious eyes upon the profit and advantages obtained from the truck system by their fellow employers. In the centres where the truck system was abolished a small shopkeeping class had sprung into existence. This class continually grumbled at the employers who still maintained the truck system, for it deprived them of a large custom. The beginning of this winter was a hard time for this middle class, and its complaints increased in volume, and found expression in public meetings organised for the purpose. The anti-truck system section of the employers encouraged this agitation and openly gave it their blessing. At last a petition was sent to Parliament, and its contents betray the varying interests of shopkeepers, employers, and, in a slighter degree, workers. It runs as follows :—

At a meeting of owners of property, tradesmen, workmen, and others. . . .

* *Merlin*, May 8th, 1830.

That this meeting has seen with dismay the wide-spreading ruin and destruction of property inflicted in a portion of this parish by the truck system, and has but too much reason to fear that, unless legislature interferes, the money-paying masters will be compelled in self-defence to adopt the same pernicious practice—that if this system were to prevail it would be attended with the ruin of the property, the fruits of the industry and frugality of all their whole lives invested by them in the creation of this large town. That the practice of paying wages in truck is not only a violation of law, but a gross and cruel infringement on the interests of every class which contributes directly or indirectly to the support of the state. It deprives tradesmen of legitimate custom, depreciates the value of property, disables the money-paying manufacturers from fair competition, enslaves the workman and exposes him without any remedy to all the fraud and oppression which has invariably accompanied the truck system. . . .*

Before this anti-truck movement could make any headway the great question of reform had intervened and the quarrel of capitalists and tradesmen died down, both being gradually absorbed in the great political questions of the day. By this time the employers had solidified their economic position, and established themselves firmly against both landed proprietors and the working classes. The capitalists had established economic domination over the workers; they had grown powerful and wealthy, and had insinuated themselves into the positions of magistrates and commissioners of peace. The comparative tranquillity of the period prior to 1830 had allowed them, and their economic interests had compelled them, to turn their attention to the question of political issues.

The political consciousness of the textile capitalists of Yorkshire, Lancashire, etc., had already manifested itself. This can be explained by the advanced development of the textile industries and the fact that there was international trade in these industries. Their advocacy of a reformed parliamentary system was inspired by their desire to dominate politically. The legislation of the landed classes was not of a type which would meet the needs of capitalist industry. Systems of tariff hindered trade; corn laws made for high prices and, consequently, big profits for farmers and high rents for landowners.

* *Merlin*, November 27th, 1830.

High prices had to be accompanied by high wages, and this lessened the capitalists' profit. Members were elected to Parliament to represent insignificant places whilst huge centres of industry were without representation. It was for the reform of such a system that the capitalists clamoured, and, as early as 1776, industrial towns such as Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and Birmingham were demanding representation of their interests in Parliament. The rising capitalist class required legal and political power to assist and guard the development of the new method of production. Political measures and policies were now to reflect new national and social requirements. New class interests manifested themselves under the cloak of reform.

However, it is not until the closing stages of the Reform agitation that we find the capitalists of South Wales entering whole-heartedly into the movement. Their interests in Russia, Turkey, on the Continent, and in America were so large now as to require State protection. Government of the State by themselves meant that they would control their own foreign interests. The *Merlin* newspaper, which was their mouthpiece, said in its leader that

> we are advocates for every species of reform—reform in the State, reform in the law, reform in our moral habits, and reform in all things that tend to make us better and happier. That an old wall or ditch, or a village with two or three huts, should return two, or even one, member to Parliament is an absurdity for which we do not contend. Many places with half the inhabitants of Merthyr are still to return two members. . . .
>
> This district through which our paper circulates is no longer an unknown nook, a petty hole and corner of the kingdom. It is the centre of important speculations and of great trade.*

This state of affairs was now to be altered and the capitalists to have a say in the management of the country. The rule of the landed aristocracy militated against the interest of those important speculators and great traders, and it must be removed if the capitalists were to prosper.

> He had long been of the opinion [says B. Hall, ironmaster, at a Newport meeting] that reform of some kind was

* March, 1831.

imperatively necessary. . . . He had some time ago wished that a public meeting of the county should have been called to advocate the principle, and to show the independence of its inhabitants, which, in common with that of other parts of the kingdom, had so long been menaced, if not destroyed, by the tyrannical abuses of the oligarchy. . . . Were the wishes and feelings of those who represented the whole wealth and importance of the county to be spurned and set at nought by the two great houses of Beaufort and Tredegar ?

Thus did Hall express the general hatred of the Welsh capitalists towards the rule of the landed proprietors in general, and the Duke of Beaufort and Lord Tredegar in particular. The ironmasters' and coal-owners' interests were represented in the election of 1831 by this same Ben Hall, and C. H. Leigh, a Pontypool ironmaster, said at a supporters' meeting :—

The measure which they had introduced would at once break down that barrier of aristocratical influence which had so long confined and limited the just rights of the people. It had property and intelligence for its basis, and it would be effectual in averting all those evils which threatened the country from a long system of oppression, and the disappointment of hopes too long deferred and too often blighted. *

In this way the blame for the terrible distress of the time consequent on another trade depression was laid at the door of the landed aristocracy. The cause of the acute misery was represented as being a bad parliamentary system. This was the message that the capitalists conveyed to the thousands upon thousands of starving workmen.

At one pit . . . sixty or seventy men were employed, and all but three were in receipt of parish relief ; and this may be taken as an example of what others suffered.†

Miners' wages were as low as 10*s.* per week, and having to pay 1*s.* 6*d.* to 2*s.* per week rent, one can hardly imagine how they existed. The streams of Irish immigrants further aggravated the situation, and a correspondent to the local newspaper said :—

The condition of the labouring people is worse than it has been for some years, which he attributes to the number of

* *Merlin*, March, 1831.
† " History of Merthyr," Wilkin.

Irish immigrants that come in daily by the steam packet from Bristol. Day after day groups of men, women, children, for the most part without shoes or stockings, are seen parading our streets begging at tradesmen's shops and houses, and applying to the overseers for relief.

In addition to the unrest due to economic conditions, we find the minds of the workers inflamed by electioneering stunts and the cry of " Freedom, Justice and Equality ! " As a result of capitalist propaganda the dissatisfaction of the workers expressed itself in hatred of the large landowners. By saying that the workers' conditions were due to the rule of the landlords, it was fairly easy for the capitalists to obtain the men's support. The demand for reform was one that was as popular with the workers as with the capitalists. Both needed it badly, but each required a different type of reform. The capitalists saw their own interests plainly enough, but the clothing of those interests in democratic phraseology deluded the workers. At a banquet after his election Ben Hall said : " Every one will admit that property ought to have some kind of protection, but such is my hatred of the present system, etc." It can be realised that he had no doubts as to the " sacred rights of property."

But at this time a new movement was being born which did not satisfy itself with abstract declamations, but rather tended to apply those abstractions to concrete conditions. The most outstanding representative of this movement was John Frost, a man destined to become the leader of the first political effort of the proletariat of South Wales. He was a tailor carrying on business at Newport. In addition to being a local councillor, he was looked up to as being a man of outstanding sagacity. At the same banquet at which Ben Hall's political victory was celebrated he made the following speech :—

The task which he [B. Hall] has undertaken is an arduous one. It will be an arduous one. What is the state in which we find our country ? We find her burdened with a debt of eight hundred millions of money ; and this, sir, contracted to promote neither the happiness nor honour of the country. We find the working classes in a state of great poverty, and they are kept quiet only by the hope that reform will better their

conditions. We find the property of the merchant, the farmer, and the tradesman daily decreasing in value. . . . What, sir, does the Church require no reform ? Does Christianity require that bishops should have ten or twenty thousands a year, while those who perform the duty to have from fifty to a hundred ? *

Thus did Frost speak, and truly did he say that the workers were pacified by the hopes of reform. In fact, as we have seen, they were encouraged to strive for reform by the capitalists, and such was their earnest enthusiasm that few people living in the area were courageous enough openly to oppose their ideals.

Political unions were organised in every centre of industry, and free literature was distributed. One hundred copies of Cobbett's " Twopenny Trash " circulated monthly in Merthyr alone, besides other pamphlets and papers. The ferment of democratic ideas, the depression in trade, and the truck system combined to bring the feeling of the working classes to boiling-point. The capitalists were concerned in utilising this psychological moment to obtain the Reform Bill, and in the process they gave the workers of South Wales their first political lessons. But good intentions do not always lead to heaven, as the capitalists later discovered. Crawshay, the " Iron King " of Merthyr, was extremely energetic in the cause of reform, and instilled reform ideas into the heads of his workmen. Nevertheless, that did not prevent him on March 28th from giving them notice of a reduction in wages to the extent of about 40 per cent. Of course, the cause of this again was laid at the door of landed rule. The workers, however, continued working right up until March 28th, but in the intervening time a number of incidents occurred which are of great interest in understanding the events that followed.

Crawshay had nominated a Reform candidate to stand for Leicester during the May elections. The usual electioneering occurred, and feeling ran high. A large assembly met just outside Merthyr on May 2nd, " which sprung from motives purely political, and was distinguished by the usual feelings and expressions common amongst such

* *Merlin*, May 14th, 1831.

persons on similar occasions."* The election excitement was rising and was gripping the whole population. Exactly the same sort of thing was going on in the valleys of Monmouthshire and around Swansea and Neath. On May 9th a large meeting was held in Merthyr, and

> my miners [said Crawshay] had heard that Mr. Stephens, a most respectable shopkeeper in Merthyr Tydvil, would not join me in supporting a Reform candidate for the county of Brecon, and such was their attachment to me, and such their feelings upon the subject of reform, that on that day they and other men, to the number of about 5,000 persons, met in the town of Merthyr opposite Mr. Stephens' house. . . . One of the orators proclaimed . . . that every one who was an enemy to Reform should be hung on the gallows.

In addition to this they broke the windows of the Anti-Reformers' houses and burned one of them in effigy. However, no attempts were made by the local ironmaster-magistrates to punish or prevent these intimidations—in fact, they increased their political propaganda. Beer was as plentiful for the Reformers as free political pamphlets. The capitalists had encouraged the workers to think about Reform, and had encouraged them to criticise the landlords ; but the workers now began to criticise their employers.

On Monday, May 30th, 1831, a large meeting was held at Waun Fair, outside Merthyr. Flags with inscriptions of "Reform" on them and red flags were planted in the centre of the meeting. The meeting had been called to consider the "Reform question," and a huge number of workers attended.

> I heard several speak [said J. Petherick, coal agent, of Merthyr], one of them from notes, in which he described the revenues of bishops and the Church of England. Most of them spoke in great praise of the reform in Parliament, by which, they said, the men would obtain their rights. . . . Other speakers got up and went into new matters. Two or three complained of the conduct of the parish officers towards the poor, also of improper use of the parish funds, and of the use of the public money generally. . . . One of the speakers said they must and would have the Court of Requests down. He also said "You have been petitioning Parliament several

* H.O., 52, 16.

times and for years, and there is no notice taken of them. My plan is to bring matters to a short conclusion, and I advise every one of you to refrain from working any longer." He was a stranger to me, and advised them to "apply to the parish offices in the parish you live for relief which is allowed by law. You will then be removed to the parishes to which you belong in the case of you being strangers. All this and your support will cause very great expense, which must fall on the ratepayers, who are generally farmers, and who cannot afford to pay more than they now do." The question whether the resolution "not to go to work" was then put. . . . As far as I could see the motion was carried almost unanimously and with acclamation.*

On the following Thursday the workers met in a large assembly at Merthyr. Crawshay † had been boasting that the wages he paid were higher than those paid elsewhere. The rumour got abroad that Fothergill, the managing partner of the Aberdare Works, had said that his men received 5*s*. per week less than the Dowlais and Merthyr workers. This roused the strikers, and they decided to march to Aberdare to meet Fothergill. On arriving at his residence they compelled him, by threats, to sign a paper stating that he had not said that the miners of Mr. Crawshay were getting 5*s*. per week more than his miners. They then demanded food, and all the bread, cheese and beer in the house was given to them. Afterwards they proceeded to the company shop and compelled the manager to throw all the food out to the crowd of hungry workers. Then they marched back to Merthyr with the intention of pulling down the Court of Requests, and thus destroying the institution which took away the furniture from their houses even when their stomachs were empty. The debts which most of them had accumulated were kept account of in this court, and so the majority of them had an immediate interest in destroying the Court and with it the accounts. They first wrecked the houses of the Court bailiffs, then marched on to the Court and wrecked that too. The Clerk of the Court was compelled to hand over the account books, and the workers made merry by burning the evidences of their indebtedness. The

* *Cambrian*, June 24th, 1831.
† A prominent ironmaster and coal-owner.

Cyfarthfa Works were stopped working, after which they proceeded to Penydarren and Dowlais and stopped the works there.

The local capitalists, having become more than ordinarily frightened, had sent urgent messages to the Brecon Barracks for soldiers. As a result, a section of the 93rd Highlanders arrived on the Friday morning, Crawshay, Hill, Homfray and other employers proudly walking at their head through the town. The soldiers were drawn up outside the Castle Inn, whilst the employers, in the legal garb of magistrates, considered the position with the High Sheriff. The strikers, also, had agreed to meet and deliberate, and whilst the employers were discussing the situation inside the inn, the workers hemmed in the soldiers outside. Many were armed with clubs, mandrils and staves. Their numbers and temper made them desperately brave, and threats and defiant challenges were shouted at the soldiers. This menacing attitude brought the employers out of the inn, and the High Sheriff mounted a chair. He earnestly requested them to desist and spoke to the poverty-stricken crowd of law and order. The great Guest followed him, and was exceedingly fluent in describing to the workers what would be the consequences of their actions, threatening them with (legal) vengeance. But empty stomachs are not likely to heed words of warning, and it is not surprising that one of the workmen, gaining courage from the number of his fellows present, replied to Guest in equally militant style.

As the previous speakers had failed to impress the men, Mr. Crawshay, not to be behind his *confrères*, felt moved to speak more strongly to the men :—

> Go home [he roared]; you shall get no advance of wages from me by threats or violence. I defy you ! Go home if you value the safety of your lives. But this I promise you [he added], if you go home quietly, and send a deputation from each mine-level to me in fourteen days, I will thoroughly investigate your complaints of distress, and do everything in my power to relieve you.

If the employers had desired the workers to rise in revolt they could not have used more effective taunts, and these speeches only served to render them more desperate

still. Their leader, "Lewis the Huntsman," was immediately hoisted up on to a lamp-post and addressed the workers in Welsh:—

> We are met, boys [he declared], to have our wages raised, instead of which the masters have brought the soldiers against us. Now, boys, if you are of the same mind as I am, let us fall upon them and take their arms away.

Almost immediately the workers rushed upon the soldiers, who, being incapable of understanding Lewis's words, were taken quite unawares. Very quickly the workers became possessed of about thirty muskets, and a general struggle occurred. The workers pressed on and gradually beat the soldiers back into the passage of the inn. A number of the ironmasters had, however, previously been placed behind the inn windows, and just as victory seemed certain for the workers, a deadly fire was poured upon them from the windows. Several volleys were fired into the heart of the crowd, and after about twenty minutes of this unequal struggle the workers fled. They took up a position some distance from, yet overlooking, the inn. At least fifteen of their number lay dead, whilst more than sixty were badly wounded. The soldiers and employers were now besieged in the inn, and the whole district was in the hands of the workers. However, by five o'clock the Glamorgan Militia and the Llantrisant Cavalry had arrived, but, because of its commanding position, it was deemed safer to attempt to move this force to Penydarren House. This was done, and the house prepared for defence. Only half a mile away, Cyfarthfa Castle was being fired at, yet any attempt at reprisal by the soldiers was deemed impossible. The night passed fairly quietly, and the workers, tired after their previous night's march, took advantage of their situation to obtain some rest.

On the Saturday morning the workers took up their position in a ravine about two miles from Merthyr, at a place called Coedycymmer. On the high hills which flanked the Brecon road other sections were posted, and in this way it was hoped to prevent extra soldiers coming in from Brecon. A system of outposts was arranged all

around the district, and this ravine was made the headquarters. Information was received that extra ammunition and additional soldiers were expected from Brecon, and an ambush was prepared.

A number of the Cardiff Cavalry were sent from Penydarren House to escort the Highlanders. At Cefn both parties of soldiers met, and quickly made for Merthyr. Everything went well for the soldiers until they came to the ravine. Here, on both slopes, the workers had prepared heaps of great boulders which they intended to roll down to crush the soldiers. It was a perfect death-trap, and the soldiers had to retire. News was immediately sent to Penydarren House of this state of affairs, and 100 more cavalry were sent to relieve the others. On attempting to pass through the ravine, the cavalry were swept with showers of rolling boulders. The horses' legs were badly knocked about, and the relief party had to abandon its attempt, and eventually regained Penydarren.

No sooner had this attempt failed than the workers' outposts brought in the information that a detachment of Swansea Cavalry was on its way to quell the revolt. A considerable number of workers were now sent off to take a position on the Aberdare road, along which the soldiers would have to pass. Old fowling-pieces, muskets, and the arms taken from the Highlanders, were distributed among this party.

By one o'clock that afternoon the cavalry came jingling along, and so skilfully planned was the ambush that they rode right into it. So hopeless was their position that they gave up their arms without resisting. Having disarmed them, the workers sent them back to Swansea, warning them not to come again.

With these additional arms, and cheered by two victories, the workers became more enterprising. They decided to attack the force which had fortified itself in Penydarren House, and by five o'clock they had concentrated for this purpose. But by this time the ironmasters had succeeded in persuading and coercing "twelve orderly workmen" to act as a deputation, bearing an offer of truce from the employers. This offer was rejected,

and the workers began to march on Penydarren. Some apprehension was felt as to the numbers of the defending force, and eventually it was decided that the assault should be deferred to the Monday, in order that the workers of Monmouthshire and further west could come to their aid. The more ardent spirits spent the rest of the day in drilling and exercising; some went to other districts to obtain more recruits for the revolt, whilst others went back to their homes.

Postponement meant defeat! This general dispersal was of great value to the military, as it enabled the remainder of the Highlanders to get to Penydarren House and to bring in fresh ammunition. The military force now consisted of about 500 soldiers, together with a number of special constables. Probably they possessed about ten times as much ammunition as the workers, and now provided a formidable force to be attacked by inadequately armed men. The defeat of the Saturday and the ignominious disarming of the Swansea Cavalry filled the soldiers with an intense desire for revenge.

On the Monday morning the general meeting of all the workers engaged in the Breconshire, Monmouthshire, and East Glamorganshire works and collieries was held on the Waun Hill, by Dowlais. It was estimated that quite 22,000 workmen attended, but this figure is probably much too high. By ten o'clock the march to the attack on Penydarren had begun, but the soldiers came out to meet it. John Guest and his profit-making colleagues marched in front of the soldiers, the Sheriff carrying the inevitable Riot Act. In the narrow part of the valley where Dowlais is situated, the soldiers and workers met. Each party seemed afraid of the other, the soldiers of the numbers of the workmen, and the workmen of the arms of the soldiers. During this pause Guest advanced towards the workers and warned them of the consequence of their unseemly acts. The workers shouted derision. The Sheriff read the Riot Act with alacrity, and the soldiers were ordered to level their muskets. The workers faltered and sullenly retreated. They had been trapped, and the advantage was all on the employers' side. The postponement of the

attack from Saturday to Monday had allowed their enthusiasm to evaporate and caused failure. Many of them returned to their homes, but the majority made for the headquarters in the ravine which saw their first success. They carried with them two black flags, emblems, as the bourgeois historians put it, of mischief. The ever-watchful Crawshay noted their retreat from the tower of his palatial castle, and reported that they were drilling and parading in the ravine. About noon the whole body was seen to be making for the town and preparing to attack it. Then, owing to internal differences, the ranks thinned, many of the workers making their way over the mountains to Tredegar and Aberdare.

Crawshay, seeing this split, sent an urgent message to the military, urging them to attack and rout the divided workers. As a result of a misapprehension this policy was not adopted, the military confining themselves to clearing the large numbers of strange workers out of Merthyr. By six o'clock all the armed bands had been dispersed from the town and the organisation of search parties had been begun. The local capitalists, as the leaders of the various search parties, were the most energetic sleuth-hounds, and guided the soldiers into the secret nooks and dingles among the hills where many of the workers were hiding. The party led by Guest captured fourteen of the ringleaders, whilst the energetic Crawshay had a bag of quite as many, among whom was "Dick Penderyn." "Lewis the Huntsman" still eluded them, and the employers searched every wood, hill and dale in order to find him. These man-hunts were carried out in the most ruthless manner, each party vying with the other as to who would bring in the most rebels.

On Wednesday information was taken to Crawshay that "Lewis the Huntsman" was hiding in a wood above Hirwain, and that night Crawshay, under the cover of darkness, led a party of soldiers to the wood and succeeded in catching him.

The Tuesday following the fiasco of Monday saw the men return to work, the presence and activity of the soldiers being an important factor in determining their

attitude. The capitalists now confined their attention to teaching the workers a lesson. As local magistrates, they tried and punished their own workers, and so severely did they carry out their punitive measures that even a local capitalist paper was forced to declare that " enough has been done to satisfy vengeance, enough to vindicate the institutions of social order—and enough, we trust, to deter mischievous demagogues from exciting, and an ignorant populace from abetting, a repetition of such wild and wicked tumults." Yet the local capitalists' sense of justice was not satisfied until they had condemned to the gibbets " Dick Penderyn " and " Lewis the Huntsman." Lewis Lewis (the Huntsman), whether spy or, as is rumoured, the illegitimate son of a noble father, was reprieved and allowed eventually to escape. Dick Penderyn was hanged on the most flimsy evidence, and this in spite of a huge petition drawn up by the workers who loved him well.

The workers had gone too far to please those people who had given them their political lessons, and they now, with cruel austerity, attempted to crush their aspirations. The men's revolt had frightened the Government, and, what was not expected, the capitalists too. In fact, the local employers were more frightened than the Government, if the letters which were sent to the Home Office are any criterion. Crawshay's letter to the *Observer,* with its " my miners' attachment to me," contrasts ironically with his letters to the Home Secretary, pleading that the soldiers should be allowed to remain to guard his works from the attacks of his workers.

" The bulk of the miners are ashamed and cowed," wrote the military Digby Mackworth on June 20th,* and as far as the local capitalists were concerned it was wiser to keep them cowed than to arouse them by political propaganda. Speaking at Newport on September 14th, 1831, a representative of the employers well portrayed the lesson to be learned from the past events. He said :—

I venture to assert the certain success of reform, from the confidence I have in the people, for although no other power

* H.O., 52, 16.

under heaven but themselves can deprive them of their political liberty, they may long retard, if not wholly obstruct, the attainment of that inestimable benefit. If you ask how you are to cause that dire misfortune, I answer by outrage, tumult or disorder. . . . Ask yourself what have you to lose by disturbing the bonds of society? Tumult and disorder, once begun, where are they to end? Bad and violent passions, once aroused, how are they to be subdued? . . . Commerce would be paralysed, manufactures would cease, employment would not be obtained, the hands would be idle, and how then would the mouths be fed? . . . But I have certainly felt, and that strongly, the baseness, the insanity of those acts of violence, of tumult and of crime, which, during the present week, have disgraced the Midland counties. . . . The authors of these outrages, gentlemen, have no part with us; we disown them and their deeds; their acts are disgraceful as men and injurious to us as reformers.*

This was the lesson that the revolt had taught the capitalist class, and one that they were not likely to forget. But the left wing of the reform movement was developing. The lower strata of the middle classes, who were independent workers, leaned more and more toward the workers. Frost, who followed this speaker, concerned himself with defending the men who had revolted, for although the people of Notts and Derby had been spoken of only, it was an attack upon the Welsh workers as well.

Who is there [said Frost] then who does not look to the future with serious apprehension? . . . I see nothing before us but years of commotion. From everything I have read, from everything I have seen, I cannot come to the conclusion that men in power ever listen to the voice of reason. The interests of the governors and the governed are so opposed to each other, there will be such struggles on the one side to retain power, and on the other to obtain freedom, that I can see no peace for the country for years to come.

The learned gentleman has recommended that every one should refrain from violence. I also give the same advice; but, sir, while we recommend peace let us not forget the difference in our situations and that of the poor weavers of Nottingham and Derby. It may be very easy for those who are well fed and well clothed to have patience, but not quite so easy for those who are starving to follow the advice. They have for some time been looking for relief from the Reform Bill. Their hopes have been disappointed, and if they give way to passion,

* *Merlin.*

if excesses follow the rejection of the Reform Bill, we ought to look to the cause.*

Truly, a fine piece of reasoning, and one that shows Frost as being, above all things, a realist.

Let us now follow the course of events in relation to the capitalists' bid for power, and leave the activities of the workers for separate treatment. The capitalists had learned the lesson that it was dangerous to influence the workers to think and act, and the conversion of store-houses into barracks was one of the means by which the workers were "cowed." But this did not prevent the capitalists from threatening to use the workers if the Reform Bill were not passed.

Thus free to act and think [says the editor of the *Merlin*], undictated to and unbiassed, he has looked to the right and left, read arguments *pro* and *con*, conversed with men of all creeds and all grades. The result of his enquiries has been that without *reform* there must be, and will be, *revolution*. There is a deep-rooted, determined spirit amongst the people to obtain the object of their wishes. . . . Our paper is the mirror of popular opinion.*

All the letters written to the Home Office tend to convey the same impression, and hardly any of the local capitalists failed to write such letters, presumably, to frighten the Government into passing the Reform Bill.

At last, on June 7th, 1832, amidst great rejoicing, the Reform Bill passed through the House of Parliament. The "Great Charter," as it has been called, swept away fifty-six "rotten boroughs," which, with less than 2,000 inhabitants, returned 111 members, and the industrial areas were given representation. The industrial area of South Wales had four additional members, and the "centre of important speculations and great trade" was now able to voice its interests. But the franchise was confined to £10 householders, and thus the vast majority of the workers were in exactly the same position as before.

The franchise reform and the redistribution of seats now gave political power to the capitalist class, and the composition of the new House of Commons was very different from that of the old. Guest, Hall and others

* *Merlin*, October, 1821.

were returned in the elections, and represented the interests of capitalism in South Wales. The passing of this Bill opened the hearts and pockets of the ironmasters and coal-owners, who "with accustomed generosity caused beer to be given away at various public-houses." Dances and balls were held to commemorate the victory, speeches were made and bonfires lighted. The ideals of the capitalists had been realised, and were well expressed by Guest:—

> I want [he said] free trade of all description. No man can doubt that the present system of titles is one which I will not call shameful, but one under which the country cannot prosper. . . . When I say reform, I mean not spoliation, but reform in power to procure the removal or amelioration of these taxes which press upon industry, and place them instead upon those who are better able to bear them.*

Struggles of Early Unionism

We must now retrace our steps a little in order to follow up the workers' activities from the revolt of June, 1831. In their movement tracts and pamphlets were profusely distributed, and in all probability a number of pamphlets advocating trade unions had been circulated as well. The Association for Protection of Labour had been formed in the north of England in the previous year. Its object was to resist wage reductions, but not to strike for advances. It was an organisation for defence and not for attack. Its constitution resembled that of the existing cotton-spinners in so far as it was a federation of societies, and not of individual members. Each society paid an entrance fee of £1, 1*s.* each for its members, and 1*d.* per week per member afterwards. John Doherty was its first secretary, and under his control the Association published a host of pamphlets. In all probability it was these pamphlets that Crawshay referred to as the "inflammatory tracts" which were circulating in the district. The leaders in the late "disturbances" were, undoubtedly, familiar with these tracts, and must have retained some of their ideas of organisation after the strike of 1830 and through the revolt of 1832. Whilst no direct proof exists

* *Merthyr Guardian*, December, 1832.

as to whether or not the loose organisation which was formed in 1830 continued, it is probable that it did so in a quiescent form. The immigrant workers from Cheshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, etc., who were used to trade unions prior to coming to South Wales, aided the old leaders to build up what was in all probability at first a secret organisation.

Although trade unions had been made legal organisations in 1824, yet the determination of the employers to keep the workers uncombined, and therefore at their mercy, still prevented these organisations from having an open existence. The existence of the "Friendly Society of Coal Mining" at the end of 1830 is fairly certain, for in April, 1831, they appointed a delegate to attend a colliers' conference at Bolton, where it was decided to affiliate to the Association for Protection of Labour.

The time was not only ripe for such an organisation, but also for the development of such a movement throughout South Wales. The livelihood of the workers was as precarious and wretched as it had ever been. The truck system still remained in operation, and, coupled with bad trade and low wages, made the conditions quite intolerable. The workers had failed to obtain redress by one method, but the wretchedness of their conditions spurred them on to attempt new methods. On the first Monday in June, 1831,

> a large body of workmen belonging to the Lansamlet Colliery assembled at the Town Hall, Swansea, for the purpose of representing their grievances to the magistrates and of complaining against the truck system to which they were subjected. Having respectfully stated their complaints, the magistrates explained the powers vested in them to enforce the payment of the men's wages in money, and recommended its adoption. To this recommendation the agent of the works immediately acquiesced, and the men returned to work.*

The following day all the colliers who worked at the Landore Colliery marched up to the Swansea Town Hall, and in the same forcibly respectful way demanded payment of wages in cash. "Their wishes were readily complied with." The intellect of the workers had not been set to

* *Cambrian*, June 10th, 1831.

work in vain during the reform agitation, and gradually the idea of unions became more popular. The "Union Clubs" took root and began to have an open existence. An active propaganda, both persuasive and forceful, was begun, and the "Union Clubs" sprang up in every centre. By September almost every works, in both coal and iron, had its branch of the "Union Club," and a full-time organiser, Twiss, from the north, was employed to solidify the organisation. From Swansea and Neath in the west to Pontypool and Brynmawr in the east, a chain of "Union Clubs" was formed, and was beginning to cause some apprehension in the minds of the employers. The rules of these embryo trade unions were secret, and each member had to swear certain oaths. Through the use of spies the following copy of the initiation ceremony into the Friendly Society of Coal Mining was published in the *Cambrian* newspaper on November 11th, 1831 :—

Copy of Union Club Oaths

Prepare, prepare, for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return. So, therefore, fall down on your knees, and lay your right hand on this Holy Book, and your left hand on your heart, and say after me this solemn obligation :

Question : What is your name ?

Is it of your free will that you come here to join this Friendly Society of Coal Mining ? I do.

1. I most solemnly and sincerely swear, with my hand on the Holy Book and on my bended knees, that I never will tell who gives me this solemn obligation, or these witnesses present as long as I live. So help me God.

2. I will enter this Society and will pay according to the rules, or as the Committee thinks proper, or as far as lies in my power. So help me God.

3. I never will instruct any person into the art of coal mining, tunnelling or boring, or engineering, or any other department of my work, except to an obliged brother or brothers, or an apprentice. So help me God.

4. I will never work any work where an obliged brother has been unjustly enforced off for standing up for his price, or in defence of his trade. So help me God.

5. I will never take any more work than I can do myself in one pay, except necessity requires me to do so ; and if I do, I will employ none but an obligated brother, and will pay him according to the master's price, or according to his work.
So help me God.

6. I never will leave my work to be supported by this Society, without first having acquainted the Committee, and will pay my share down justly and truly, and will act accordingly. So help me God.

7. I never will injure an obligated brother, or anything belonging to him, before I acquaint him of his foreseen danger.
So help me God.

8. I will never in a boasting manner make known how much money I get, or in how short a time. So help me God.

9. I will never make known any signs, tokens, passwords, or guess, or write them on stones, sand, wood, tin, lead, or anything visible or invisible to the eye. So help me God.

10. I will never make these obligations known to either master, manager, or underkeeper, overlooker, book-keeper, or any person, except to a legal obligated brother.
So help me God.

If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word ; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. And Deuteronomy, chap. xxiii., verses 21–23.

To such a degree were the workers terrorised into secret and underground methods ! Movements which adopt underground methods are weak and persecuted movements, and such were the workers' movements in South Wales in those early days. The competition for the available work was such as practically to force the workers already employed to secure their positions, as far as possible, by combination. The methods of the " boss " and his undercutting tactics led to a general agreement amongst the workers concerned as to what price they would expect for certain work. The " Union Club " rules show an opposition to a threefold attack upon the livelihood of the workers : first, the oaths and secrecy betray the legal and economic persecution by the employing class ; second, the refusal to instruct others shows the fear of the effects of the great mass of unemployed and a desire to monopolise

and preserve their craft; and third, the rules relating to prices and quantities of work reflect the price-cutting propensities of the "boss" in the works.

Although organisations of workmen had been made legal by the repeal of the combination laws in 1824, the workers in these unions were to feel heavily the displeasure of the capitalists. Early in September the campaign against the "Union Clubs" was launched by the employers. At the Neath Abbey Works some fifty or sixty men had joined the union, and endeavoured in numerous unpleasant ways to compel the rest of the men to join. The employers called a meeting of the men and told them that the "union men" were not to be allowed to continue working. All the men who "trusted their employers" were asked to move to the right of the meeting place, whilst those who were in the union and intended remaining in the union were asked to move to the left in order that they could be dismissed. By this method the "Union Club" at this works was smashed, to the great joy of the local capitalist newspaper.*

This process of breaking down the "Union Clubs" was not always so easily effected. It will be sufficient to cite the instance of "union smashing" at Merthyr, as it was typical of many. About September 2nd the secretary of the Merthyr "Union Club" was discharged from his employment, and it was hoped that his dismissal would do much to break up the local branch. For a week or so the workmen took no action, and in the meantime another workman had been obtained from a distant works to fill his place. This man met with the reception generally given to "blacklegs," and although the following account is rather highly coloured it doubtless has a strong kernel of truth;—

> On Monday, the 5th, J. Williams, of the Melin Griffith Works, began to work as a roller at Dowlais Ironworks instead of a man who was discharged. It seems that the poor fellow was not a member of the Union Clubs at that place, and during his work great numbers of the workmen assembled around him without actually molesting him. He was, however, alarmed by what he saw, as he was heard to say: "I think I shall be killed

* *Cambrian*, September 11th, 1831.

to-night." Owing to the state of confusion he was in, or from some other unfortunate cause, he stretched one of his legs too far back, and it was entangled in the level wheel, and so mangled as to require instant amputation high up the thigh. The poor fellow [considered as an interloper] was left a considerable time on the ground in the most wretched and agonised condition before any of the members around him would render him the least assistance, or even pick him up.*

The eyes of the above writer, with his spectacles of capitalist interests, evidently could see no need for the "railing off" of dangerous wheels. However, the truth that lies in the above statement illustrates vividly the desperate temper of the workers.

Press propaganda continued against the unions and, as usual, continually brought to light "cases of ill-treatment" of non-unionists.

On the 6th of September another poor fellow belonging to the Plymouth Coal Works, Merthyr, was overwhelmed by a fall in the works, and one of his arms was broken. The other colliers saw him under the fall and refused to assist him because he was not one of the union. . . .

However much it is to be lamented that a rate of wages should exist which is scarcely sufficient to procure the necessaries and conveniences of life in return for the hard labour of the industrious, a state of things which we are sure is felt by none more acutely than the employers of these poor men, yet we are satisfied that it is impossible that any combination, such as the one in question, can raise wages, when labour cannot be employed to the advantage of the employer.†

The employers now gave notice that after a certain date no union members would be employed. At a joint meeting of the Dowlais, Plymouth and Merthyr branches the workers decided to stick to their organisation and await the lock-out. By the end of September the unionists were locked out, and were not allowed to return except on the condition that they would "give up their union."

Crawshay and his fellow-reformers, with their cries of freedom, were as energetic in denying the workers the freedom to organise as they were enthusiastic in their agitation for their own freedom as expressed in the Reform Bill. Freedom to Crawshay and his fellows meant in this

* *Merlin*, September 17th, 1831.
† *Ibid.*

case, as in most others, freedom to exploit the workers. The lock-out continued through October, and the position of the unionists was most pitiable. They received 4*s*. to 5*s*. each per week, and later on supplies of flour were sent by neighbouring branches to be distributed amongst them.

Many workers applied to the magistrates for parish relief. Bruce and Rev. G. Thomas heard their appeals, and took the opportunity of severely chastising them for their obstinate persistence in remaining members of the union. Holding, as they did, the whip hand, these two magistrates attempted to draw from the workers the secrets and objects of the unions. The following statements will be of even more interest to the workers of to-day than they were to Lord Aberdare's ancestor and the very reverend Thomas:—

Wm. Howell: . . . That he has a wife and two children. Has applied to overseer for relief and was refused, having been discharged from Dowlais because he would not give up Union Club, of which he has been a member about three months. . . . Will not say whether there is a statement that the masters, before the world will come to its place, must be brought more on a level with the workmen, but thinks they ought to be. Declines answering whether there is a rule which states that the masters are not to be instructed (the workmen having already taught them too much), and that if any plan is tried and is successful in the work, the master is not to be informed. . . .

Morgan Thomas: . . . Is a unionist. They do not want to lower the wages, nor to raise them until their masters are able to afford it. They are not to judge of their ability to do so; one Twist [Twiss], a delegate from the Northern Lodge, has said that the Authority Lodge is to judge whether the masters can afford it or not. Knows nothing about the Authority Lodge; has heard about No. 1 Lodge, Bolton. . . . He is not one of the union inspectors of the Plymouth Levels. There is one of that description. Works at No. 2 Level. When a unionist leaves his work, the inspector is to judge it. If a dispute should arise about the value of the work, he would take the opinion of the inspector before Mr. Steele, manager.

However, the Christian charity of Thomas and Bruce was not sufficient to grant relief to the starving wives and children of these poor workers.

Much of the wretchedness of the workers expressed itself in a religious form, and many of the phrases of the

old prophets echoed around the small meeting-places. Denied a happy existence in this world, the workers dwelt on the thought of such an existence in a future one, but the key even to that was denied them if they were members of the union. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists held an assembly at Tredegar on October 19th and condemned the "secret union clubs," and, further, decided that no unionist should be admitted to church membership, and called upon all to sever their connection with the union movement. How often, in religious movements, does God's favour go hand in hand with the employers' interests ?

The condition of the workers was becoming more wretched as the lock-out continued, and even the capitalist papers admitted that the men, with their wives and children, were starving. A letter written from Merthyr at the time said :—

> This place is in a dreadful state. The moment the news arrived of the disturbance in Bristol, the Union Clubs all met—what happened I know not. All is quiet, but every one is apprehensive. Thousands are out of employment and starving. The men know all that passes, and are evidently plotting. They talk of revolution. . . . Twiss, the agitator, is still here. He preached last week from Isaiah xx. [xxiv.], verse 21. We expect the close of this week to see the climax of our efforts.*

Because thousands were starving, because babies were crying for food and tugging at breasts which could supply no milk, because of these things, the close of this week did "see the climax of our efforts." The workers were beaten, returned to work, and gave up their Union Clubs.

The presence of the soldiers had prevented those hungry babies from being satisfied by pillagings, and the great Crawshay was once more able to set his works going and obtain his profits, which a few years later assisted Raikes in starting his Sunday School in Merthyr, and drilling godliness and Christian charity into the hearts and heads of those very babies; that is, those that survived the effects of that hungry period. But the Welsh capitalists did not succeed in crushing out the resistance of the workers; rather did they drive it into more secret channels. The

* *Merlin*, November 12th, 1831.

cause of the workers' activities remained, and if suppressed in one direction found expression in another. In this way arose that movement known to history as the Scotch Cattle. It was composed of the more ardent spirits who had been active in the "Union Club" movement, and was strictly limited to those workers who could be relied upon. Each ironworks and pit had its own lodge or club, and they held their meetings in the back room of an inn, or in a quiet spot on the mountain-side. It was not upon force of numbers that they relied to put into effect their decisions. All decisions were enforced by terrorist methods, by threats and violence.

The first sign of this new movement appears in February, 1832. Messrs. Russell and Brown, owners of the Nantyglo, Blaina and Coalbrookdale Works, had "made a proposition, previous to the coming into operation of the Truck Bill, to lower wages 5 to 6 per cent., at the same time to advance cash two or three times per week if the workers wished it, and also to lower provision prices in their shop by 10 or 15 per cent." The workers refused to accept this proposal and struck work. They demanded the abolition of the truck system according to the Anti-Truck Act of October, 1831, which their previous activities had forced from the Government. After the strike had continued for a fortnight, the workers became desperate. Blacklegs had been employed, and this irritated the workers more than ever. The works manager's house was stoned, and a bull's head painted in red upon the doors of the blacklegs' dwellings. This bull's head was the warning sign of the Scotch Cattle. Still, however, the blacklegs continued working. The following night the vengeance of the Scotch Cattle was felt.

> On the night of 17th of February, 150 to 200 men met at a place called the Cornish Pit, where they were commanded by their leaders to turn their coats and black their faces—an order which was promptly obeyed. They then proceeded, headed by a man blowing a horn, to the cottages of two marked men . . . and broke open the windows, destroyed the furniture and beat the offending inmates in a most brutal manner.

The military were called in, but were unable to prevent the workers from continuing their violent tactics. On

Sunday, April 8th, the Scotch Cattle went, in the darkness, over the mountain to Abersychan and destroyed the house and furniture of a blackleg who was working at Nantyglo. A reward of £15, a very large sum in those days, failed to gain any information as to the identity of the Scotch Cattle, such was the fear of revenge and the solidarity of the workers. . . .

It was now thought that cavalry would be more successful in hunting them out than were the foot soldiers, and the infantry were withdrawn, and the Dragoons took their place. On April 20th the Commanding Officer reported to Lord Melbourne that the truck system was responsible for the riots, and asked for sanction to call a meeting of all the employers and interested persons. Lord Melbourne, then Home Secretary, sanctioned this, and on May 4th the meeting was held in Abergavenny. In his report the Commanding Officer enclosed the following resolutions, which were the decisions of the meeting :—

That it appears to the meeting that the abuses of the "Truck System," and particularly the non-payment of the workmen in money, have been among the principal causes of the illegal combinations of the workmen called the "Scotch Cattle System" whereby the rioters have lately endeavoured to prevent peaceable workmen from labouring for their masters, who have felt it necessary to reduce their wages in order to meet the unexampled depression of the trade. That the meeting cannot too strongly reprobate the practice of paying the wages otherwise than in money. That this meeting views with detestation and abhorrence that system of midnight outrage and violence which has lately disgraced the mining district under the name of Scotch Cattle, and pledge themselves collectively and individually to use every means in their power to suppress the same and to detect and bring to justice all persons guilty of those flagrant outrages.

But while all this was going on in Monmouthshire, similar incidents were occurring in Glamorganshire.

Lord Melbourne had not altogether believed the urgent letters he received from the employers, it seems, and he requested Lord Bute to send in a report of the position. Among the papers of that report the following document has the greatest interest. It was written in the Welsh

language, and red ink was used to symbolise the blood of the workers :

To all Colliers, Traitors, Turncoats and Others

We hereby warn you the second and last time. We are determined to draw the hearts out of all the men above named, and fix two hearts upon the horns of the bull, so that every one may see what is the fate of every traitor—and we know them all. So we testify with our blood.

X

Hoarfrost Castle,
April 19*th*, 1832.*

These ghastly threats give some idea of the temper of the workers, born of the squalor and misery of their conditions.

As if in order to mock the grave meeting of the military and employers at Abergavenny on May 4th, another series of raids were made less than a week after. On May 12th the *Merlin* reported :—

We have to record further acts of outrage and violence perpetrated by those nocturnal (yclept) "Scotch Cattle."

* H.O., 52, 21.

On Wednesday week last, at midnight, about 200 of these deluded men visited Blaenycum Colliery, distant from Pontypool about three miles, and commenced in their usual manner, destroying furniture, etc., of the colliers and otherwise injuring the houses by hurling immense stones at them. They have, unfortunately, succeeded in intimidating the peaceable and well disposed from pursuing their labour. There are scarcely any collieries in the hills that have escaped their visitation, the most of which have been stopped working. It seems that the men are determined to be paid weekly for their labour in the current coin of the realm, and will not be compelled, as heretofore, to deal in the shops of their employers.

The introduction of more soldiers, the partial revival in trade, the relaxation, and in some cases abolition, of the truck system, resulted in the practical disappearance of the Scotch Cattle for the space of a year. But this vicious body, born of weakness and suppression, reappeared in Dowlais in May, 1833. The colliers and ironworkers had decided that their wages should be increased, and gave notice to the employers accordingly. A number of the workers at the Bute Works did not, and apparently would not, give notice to their employers that they required increased wages. The Scotch Cattle from the Monmouthshire side went to Dowlais on the night of May 2nd and wrecked numerous dwellings of those workers who refused to ask for increased wages. The local iron-master-magistrates thought that the epidemic of the previous year was to be imitated, and they immediately swore in dozens of special constables. One of the magistrates reported to the Home Office that he had advised those people who were attacked to fire at the Scotch Cattle with the guns that had been provided.

We understand [wrote the editor of a local paper] that it is the intention of the Government to offer a reward for the apprehension of the ringleaders. In the meantime, several spirited individuals are on the alert, and if these "Bulls of Basan" make another irruption, we would advise them to carry hides that are shot-proof.*

Another instance occurred at Rhymney, but through the "vigorous exertions of the magistrates" it was soon quelled. In the spring of 1834 the Scotch Cattle again

* *Merthyr Guardian*, May 11th, 1833.

came into prominence, and caused the local factors great apprehension. During the months April, May and June small wages disputes were attended with the usual visitations and destruction.

> A very large meeting of magistrates of the three adjoining counties of Glamorgan, Monmouth, and Brecon, was held at the Rumney Inn, to take into consideration the best means of repressing these outrages, the Rev. Wm. Powell, vicar, in the chair. Large subscriptions were made for the furtherance of the above object. . . .*

Larger rewards were offered for the arrest of the "Bulls," as the leaders of the Scotch Cattle were called. All of this was of no avail, the small fortunes offered for information failing to bring any results.

A great revival in trade now occurred, wages slightly increased, and, in these circumstances, the ideas embodied in the Scotch Cattle movement expressed themselves more openly and rationally. The old "Union Clubs" were re-established and affiliated to Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland. It was actually a revival of the old "Union Club," which had for so long taken the form of the secret Scotch Cattle. Hardly had the affiliation been made to the G.N.C.T.U. when the report appeared that,

> in consequence of resolutions lately adopted by the Welsh ironmasters to discharge from their employ all workmen who should not on or before Saturday last sign a declaration abandoning all connection with trade unions, the furnaces of two extensive establishments in this district since our last publication have been blown out.†

At practically every ironworks and colliery each workman had to sign a document to the effect that he was not and would not become a trade unionist. Crawshay led the attack, and at his immense works all traces of open unionism were eliminated. Again the capitalists won their point, but, as before, in place of the trade union arose the Scotch Cattle. In the winter of 1834 and spasmodically throughout 1835, the Scotch Cattle struck terror into the

* *Merthyr Guardian*, June 14th, 1834.
† *Ibid.*, July 16th, 1834.

hearts of many, but the growing trade, regular work and relatively good wages caused them finally to disappear.

During this increasing prosperity industrial action seemed less and less necessary. The bitter opposition and the still more bitter defeats caused the workers to turn their thoughts more into political channels. The workers as yet had but little class consciousness, and these movements, varied and devoid of plan or understanding, were the results of a blind attempt to alter their conditions. Lacking experience in tactics and organisation, it is no wonder that these first movements took sporadic and violent forms.

Conclusion

There has passed before our eyes in rapid review the evolution of industry, the creation of new classes, the condition of these classes and their movements. This was a period of birth, and accompanying it were birth pangs. The new economic methods destroyed the old social relations and established new ones.

The first lesson that may be learned from the history of this period is that the capitalist system has not always existed and therefore cannot remain for ever. It is a passing phase of social development. The technical evolution, the development from simple tools to the great machines and factories, was accompanied by a change in social relations. The simple handicraftsman could not himself own and utilise the great machines. The independent producer became a unit in a large factory. The handicraftsmen became wage workers for the owners of the factories, the mines and the works. There was no antagonism between the owner of the tools and the user of the tools when tools were simple. They were the property of the user. But as tools were replaced by huge machines, as mining became organised on a large scale with its big engines, trams, etc., an antagonism sprang up between the owners and the users. The evolution of the technique of production was accompanied by the growth of two distinct classes—the wage workers and the capita-

lists—and between these two classes there grew up a fierce antagonism.

This technical evolution is still proceeding, and because of it production has become social production. Social production requires social direction, and this function will eventually be exercised by the producers. To obtain social control of the means of production, to obtain the fruits of that production for society, is the task which history has placed upon the shoulders of the working class.

It may be asked why did these early workers' movements fail to succeed in this task? In this period the working class was young, and lacked both experience and consciousness. It was composed of the poorest, weakest and most ignorant section of society. There had not been time firmly to implant the necessity for permanent organisations upon the minds of the workers. A long period of working-class activity is essential for the realisation of correct organisation and tactics. This was a period of apprenticeship in working-class activity, a time of infancy. The social conditions were new, the problems to be solved were new, and a long time expired before the workers found the correct methods of dealing with these problems. The vacillation from politics to "Union Club," and then to Scotch Cattle, trade unions, and then again to politics, was really an unconscious struggle to find the correct methods.

The workers at this time may be likened to a boy who tries to swim for the first time. He gingerly enters the water, tries this way and that way, splashes about and performs many wrong movements, and it is only after many attempts that he succeeds in swimming.

Just so with the working class. It attempted this method and that, and after a long period of blind and painful struggle, it has to-day arrived at a conscious and correct understanding of its position in society. Each defeat was a lesson in tactics, each unsuccessful movement a lesson in organisation. Each movement arose with distress and vanished with the disappearance of that distress. To-day the workers see the need for, and have

evolved, permanent industrial organisations. The resultant power asserts itself politically, and more and more the workers challenge the existing order. The early movements failed because of immaturity, lack of solid organisation, and lack of consciousness ; these reasons no longer exist ; the workers of to-day should not and will not fail.

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APPENDIX I

Iron Works Built in South Wales prior to 1840, and the Approximate Dates of their Erection

Neath Abbey, (?).
Tintern Abbey, (?).
Monmouth, (?).
Pontypool, 1565.
Blaenavon, 1600.
Clydach, 1605.
Brecon, 1625 (?).
Melin Griffith, 1650.
Pipton, 1700 (?).
New West, (?).
Aberaman, 1720.
Tredegar, 1738.
Caerphilly, 1740.
Dowlais, 1748.
Ynys-ycedwyn, 1750.
Plymouth, 1763.
Cyfarthfa, 1763.
Blaenavon, 1780.
Abercarn, 1783.
Penydarren, 1784.
Ebbw Vale, 1789.
Nantyglo, 1789.
Clydach, 1793.
Beaufort, 1794.
Aberdare, 1799.
Abernant, 1799.
Treforest, 1800.
Rhymney, 1800.
Varteg, 1800.
Pentwyn, 1809.
Race, 1809.
Abersychan, 1810.
Cwmavon, 1811.
Coalbrookdale, 1811
Cwmcelyn, 1814.
Briton Ferry, 1814.
Blaina, 1816.
Gadlys, 1820.
Pontypridd, 1825.
Maesteg, 1828.

Copper Works

Taibach, 1727.
Penclawdd, 1800.
Llanelly, 1805.
Loughor, 1809.
Cwmavon, 1837.
Pembrey, 1846.

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